

COMPUTRIZED
*The Night of
the Wedding*

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Authors of "Princess Nat," "The Lion's Mouse,"
"This Woman to This Man," etc., etc.

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Contents

CHAP.	PAGE
I HIDDEN HALL COURT	7
II THE THING SHE COULD NOT TELL	18
III MARKED IN CRIMSON	27
IV THE TOUCH OF ROSE	38
V THE FURNACE	48
VI 'HE SAYS HE WILL KILL HER'	59
VII THE CONFESSION	69
VIII WHAT PANDORA FOUND IN HER CELL	79
IX DAGON	88
X THE BRAIN-IMAGE	98
XI THE PORTRAIT	109
XII ON THE EAST TERRACE	119
XIII THE ECHO	131
XIV THE FIVE PORTRAITS	141
XV THE LETTERS	153
XVI THE SCARLET CLOAK	164
XVII PANDORA AT BAY	174
XVIII WHAT MRS. PAYNTOR HAD TO TELL	187

CHAP.	PAGE
XIX IN MRS. GILLETT'S ROOM	198
XX THE KNOCKING	208
XXI THE DAVIS MYSTERY	218
XXII S.O.S.	230
XXIII 'I HAVE FALLEN IN LOVE WITH PAN'	238
XXIV A STONE WITH A HOLE IN IT	248
XXV DAGON PUTS TWO AND TWO TOGETHER	261
XXVI THE TRUTH	274

‘**I**SN’T it the most wonderful old house?’ asked Evelyn Haste, who had been Evie Carroll no longer ago than the morning.

She looked all round the beautiful dining-room, with its dark walls of ‘linen-fold’ panelling, and then flashed one of her dazzling smiles at Kennedy Haste, her husband of a few hours. ‘Now aren’t you glad I would accept the loan of it from Sir Don? It just is Romance!’

‘It’s certainly a wonderful house. But—no, I’m not very glad—yet,’ said Haste. ‘It doesn’t seem playing the game, somehow! Poor old Don was so horribly in love with you. I believe you’d have married him if——’

‘If I hadn’t met you!’ laughed Eve. ‘Well, if I had married him, it would have been to get this place. I’ve got you instead, which is about a million times better. But the next best thing to being mistress of Hidden Hall Court is having it lent to one—for one’s honeymoon with the most thrilling man on earth.’

When the most beautiful girl in the world called

one the 'most thrilling man on earth,' and one had just snatched her away from dozens of other men who wanted her, one had to throw off the shadow of gloom. Kennedy smiled adoringly across the dinner table at his American bride.

All the same it was a pity to have the smallest blot on such happiness as his, which should have been perfect, and Haste felt that he would rather have spent his honeymoon in a workman's cottage at Clapham, than at Sir Rawdon Wells' famous old place in Essex.

Rawdon was his friend, and Ken liked and admired him. But in Rawdon's place, if he'd had such a house, he would not have offered to lend it for the girl he loved to pass her honeymoon with another man. Besides, it wasn't like Rawdon to do such a thing. He was rather a brooding, revengeful sort of fellow, more like his Italian mother than any of the extremely English ancestors whose faces adorned (or didn't adorn) these walls. Why, why then had he made such a point of Evie accepting the loan of Hidden Hall Court? Haste couldn't rid himself of the heavy presentiment of something queer—something which would make them both repent coming here to stay. Stupid, perhaps. But there it was!

'Why is it called Hidden Hall Court?' Eve was asking. 'It's such a queer name, isn't it? Sounds like secret rooms and things.'

‘Shouldn’t wonder if there are secret rooms and things,’ said Haste. ‘But the place wasn’t called after anything of that sort. “Hidden” was an old family name of some ancestors of Don Wells, who died out for good in the eighteenth century. That’s when the Court came to his branch, and was supposed to bring bad luck with it.’

‘As if such a glorious place could bring bad luck!’ laughed Eve.

‘That’s the story, anyhow. And the Wells’—men and women—are always having some tragedy or other in their lives; from generation to generation.’

‘So there is a story!’ said Eve. ‘Somebody told me there was. I can’t think who now, unless it was your dear V.A.D., Miss Gillett. I asked Sir Don, and he pretended never to have heard anything.’

‘When did you have that conversation?’ Haste inquired, rather sharply. ‘Was it when he offered to lend the house?’

‘Yes, I believe it was then,’ Eve reflected.

‘Oh!’

‘Why “Oh”?’

‘Well, he wouldn’t crab the place if he wanted you to inhabit it, would he?’

Eve laughed. ‘You’re a jealous boy, Ken! You look gloomy and cross whenever we have

to mention Sir Don. What if I glared or sniffed when you spoke of Pandora—or even of Miss Gillett ? ’

‘ Pandora’s my adopted sister,’ said Ken. ‘ And poor Miss Gillett—why, compared to you she’s what a “ penny dip ” is to the planet Venus.’

‘ They both hate me like poison, all the same,’ said Eve. ‘ Not that I mind. It’s a compliment. And I loved having Pan for my bridesmaid, and inviting Miss Gillett to the wedding. You can’t say you “ loved ” asking Sir Don and his thrilling Italian cousin, Paolo Magnani ! ’

Ken laughed now. ‘ A man doesn’t exactly “ love ” having two chaps who’d joyfully see him struck by a thunderbolt, wishing him at the devil while he’s being married. And look here, if I’m “ thrilling,” you’re not to use the same adjective for anybody else.’

‘ I adore you ! ’ cried Eve. ‘ Now, if you really know it, tell me the story of this house.’

‘ I know the story, but I don’t know its truth,’ said Haste. ‘ It’s probably Tommy rot. You’ve heard the ballad of “ The Mistletoe Bough,” haven’t you ? The bride who ran away from her friends on her wedding day, and hid in an old oak chest ? Well, once something of the sort happened here, they say. She was Italian, like Don’s mother, and a beauty—a princess or something. Her husband, the first Sir Rawdon Wells

who ever lived at the Court, brought her home directly after their marriage, though the girl didn't want to come; had heard there was a curse on the place. What happened exactly seems never to have been found out; whether there was a quarrel through jealousy, and the bride was murdered by the bridegroom; whether she simply ran away; or whether she was "bewitched." But at all events she vanished and was never seen again—not even in skeleton form, like the bride in the ballad. They do say she haunts a room called the Tapestry Boudoir, however, which was given to her as her own sitting-room. Her name was *Biancà*. She ought to be a beautiful ghost, but I'm not keen on seeing her.'

'I'd love to, if you were with me,' said Eve, with a delicious little shiver. 'Not if I were alone. I'm not superstitious, but I might be silly! Did *Biancà* disappear on her wedding day?'

'On the wedding night, I rather think. But I've forgotten that detail.'

'You won't get rid of me in any such way I can tell you!' Eve smiled at him.

Though the panelled dining-room was huge, a small gate-leg table had been produced from somewhere, and given to the newly-married couple in place of the great Tudor bulk with its heavy

struts. This was their first meal in the house, for they had arrived from London in a motor-car only just in time to dress for dinner. Haste had not been able to help wondering whether Rawdon Wells had thought of this detail, or whether they had the butler to thank. He rather hoped it was the butler, a magnificent Italian—quite the ideal major-domo, got in to replace a more commonplace Englishman, taken suddenly ill. Anyhow, it was a charmingly sentimental idea, and Haste appreciated it as Eve and he touched hands across a crystal bowl of red roses.

They had had coffee together there, rather than move and break the dream of their first dinner as 'Captain and Mrs. Haste.' Yet neither had smoked, as the long-drawn-out excitement of the wedding day had given Eve a headache. Cigarettes had been left on the table, however, by the wonderful Marianti and his British assistants, and now the girl waved her hand at the silver box as she jumped up.

'Stay and smoke, Ken, and drink any horrid stuff you like,' she commanded. 'I'm going to the music-room to play you something special.' But Ken was on his feet, with no intention of letting her go.

'I'll come with you, my beauty, if you don't mind!' he exclaimed. 'I don't care a hang

whether I smoke or not. All I want is to be with you.'

'Oh, I do mind!' she argued. 'Because, you see, I want history to repeat itself. Surely you remember what happened the first night we met—just before we met.'

'Don't I!' said Haste. 'Rawdon Wells got your aunt to invite me to dinner so I could meet you. I had ninety-six hours' leave—'

'Yes! You crossed over to London. And Aunt Jean and I were on leave too, doing a rest cure from what we called our "war work"—as Miss Gillett would say. And the "Ritz" seemed the most divine place, though I little thought then I should have my wedding breakfast there. I didn't hear Sir Don bring you into Aunt Jean's sitting-room, because I was singing. And then you two were alone, for Aunt Jean had been taking a nap or something. I sang calmly on, and—you thought I had a nice voice!'

'So nice that I—well, you know the rest!'

'You said to Sir Don, "Is that an angel or a girl? Because if it's a girl I've got to marry her."'

'That's what I said. And he said—poor old bean!—"I hope I'm going to do that." Yet here we are to-night, starting our honeymoon in his house.'

'Perhaps he doesn't mind so much now, or he

wouldn't have wanted to lend it to us,' Evie consoled her sensitive husband. 'But let's not talk of him, or think of him either. I'll think of you as I sing. You'll think of me as you smoke. And we'll both think of each other. It will be like that first night of our meeting, only a hundred times better, because you did marry "that girl"!'

On this plea, Ken had to let her go. He held open the door and watched the delicate, slim figure in white, with wing-like sleeves of tulle, float into the music-room adjoining. 'We'll leave both doors open so you can hear me. These walls are thicker than at the "Ritz"!'

Eve threw him a glance over her bare shoulder, and disappeared.

Haste went reluctantly back into the dining-room, and still more reluctantly flung himself down in the chair he had lately deserted. The image of his adored girl was so clear to his mind that it was as if she still sat opposite him, her little elbow on the table.

The thought of her dazzled him—that she should be his wife!

Evelyn Carroll was a very important heiress, but that wasn't part of the dazzling thought. It could have been so only for a cold-blooded man, and Kennedy Haste was far from being cold-blooded. It was her shining hair with all its gold-brown waves he thought of, her flower-fine

skin, the dark grey eyes that made her hair look yellow by contrast ; the sweet mouth which seemed never to be twice the same ; and her dear, delicious ways. That trick of hers when you first met her, before you knew what she really was, of pretending to be just a silly young know-nothing ; then, a sudden upward glance and a few words dropped as if inadvertently, which showed what a clever darling she was.

Ah, she had begun to sing ! Her voice was sweet as honey, warm as young love, and sad as Destiny.

Haste had half mechanically lit a cigarette, but as he listened he let the newly-kindled spark die out. No wonder he had said that thing about her to Rawdon.

As the scene at the 'Ritz' came back, with Eve appearing to him for the first time, in the doorway between two rooms, he ceased to see her image in the opposite chair. He was staring across the table at the door which, by Evie's request, had been left open. Some one appeared in the doorway just as Eve had appeared that night in London, but this wasn't Eve. Eve had stopped singing, just when Haste was not sure. For one moment he forgot her.

'Why, Pan !' he exclaimed, springing up. 'Good heavens, dear child, what brings you here ?'

A girl came into the room. She was very young. Her short dress and the quaint little turban that fitted closely on the bobbed dark hair made her look almost a child.

'You wouldn't bring me, so I brought myself,' she said. 'I told you I had to come. I simply engaged a car to run me down here, and I've just arrived. I didn't ring, for there were some long windows open in the white drawing-room, and I walked in.'

Haste scarcely listened to the explained details. He was puzzled and vexed.

'But the thing's unheard of!' he exclaimed. 'Don't you realize, you absurd child, that men's sisters do not invite themselves to share their brothers' honeymoons? Does Evie know you're here?'

'No,' said the girl. 'I saw Evelyn, but she didn't see me. She was at the piano in the music-room, so I thought you'd be at the table still perhaps. Ken, I'm not an absurd child. I felt I must be with you. I felt you were going to need a friend.'

The look in her great gipsy eyes stopped Ken's laugh.

'You must tell me what you mean,' he insisted. 'You wouldn't have such a feeling without reason. You're hiding something from me.'

'I told you this morning when I begged you

bring me with you that—that I'd had a dream.'

'Nonsense! You may have had a dozen dreams. But there's more than that.'

She did not answer.

'If you don't want to be scolded, you must tell me.'

~~Ken~~ 'I can't, and won't, tell you.'

'Very well! Perhaps you'll speak out to Evie. You'll have to explain yourself, you know. I'll take you to her.'

'I don't want to go yet,' said Pandora. 'I want to stay here with you.'

'You can't. So that's that. Come along.' He took her hand, and pulled her gently but firmly towards the door.

Reluctantly she yielded, letting herself be dragged along the panelled corridor. The door of the music-room was still open. As they reached it, Ken dropped the girl's hand and allowed her to lag behind. Perhaps it would be best to break the news of her arrival to Evie, before the child showed herself. But Evie was not in the room.

‘**W**HERE can she be?’ exclaimed Haste. ‘Why, it isn’t two minutes since she stopped singing!’

But, even as he spoke, he realized that it was more than two minutes since the lovely soft voice had trailed into silence. Eve had ceased to sing before Pandora appeared and surprised him.

‘Stay here and I’ll find her,’ he said. And before the girl could dispute his decision, if she wished to do so, he was gone.

Pandora Haste walked over to the piano and picked up a little lace-edged handkerchief which Eve had dropped. She had never liked the scent which Eve used, and had made for her in Paris. It was too luscious, too much of an appeal to the senses: ‘Circe-perfume,’ the girl had called it to herself when she first began to realize Eve Carroll’s power of making men fall in love with her. Vaguely she had felt that Rawdon Wells and his companion, her own adopted brother Kennedy Haste—not to mention various others—had been caught by something compelling in Eve that was

like the perfume. But the detested fragrance of the flirt was not strong on this handkerchief. It was overcome by another odour. Pandora sniffed it, and slipped the bit of lace and nainsook into the pocket of her coat. Then she sat down to wait, and her small face was pale and troubled.

She felt very weak and spent. This was a terrible night for her! All her life seemed to be lying in ruins.

Her thoughts travelled back along the years. She had lived only twenty, but she believed that her memories began before she was two. How happy she had been—happier than any other child on earth, surely! No wonder, because other children were born into a commonplace, humdrum existence. She had begun hers like the heroine of a novel or a 'movie'!

One dark and foggy winter afternoon when Kennedy Haste was ten years old, he had come back from school to the house in Eaton Place where he and his father lived then. On the porch was a box, a box of the sort which appealed to Ken, for it was a boy's school-box. Hoping it was a surprise gift for him, he picked it up to carry indoors. But something stirred and wailed within. Ken almost dropped the box, but not quite. Manfully he staggered with it into the lighted hall, and watched by an old butler who feared a 'bomb,' the boy turned the key which was in the lock.

Wrapped in a cloud of Shetland fleece lay a very small baby, just waking up from a sleep, probably drugged, for the wrappings smelt of soothing syrup. The box was ventilated with holes at opposite sides, but the lifting of the lid brought a rush of cold air to the little lungs, and produced a roar of rage. Every one in the house seemed to hear the noise, even the boy's father, writing in his study at the back of the long hall. Soon he and a group of servants, male and female, bent above the box ; and the fate of its contents would have been decided on the spot, had not Ken been a spoiled, only child, left delicate after a long wrestle with typhoid fever.

The baby should not be sent to an orphanage, he said. Pity it was only a girl, but such as it was, it was his and he was determined to keep it. After a promise to bring the creature up on his own money (a legacy left by his mother) the boy was allowed to adopt the foundling. She was his toy—his very dear toy of whom he never—or seldom—tired. And because of the box there was a choice between two names only, for what had been found by him at the bottom of it : ' Hope ' or ' Pandora.' Ken, very keen on mythology just then, tossed up a penny. Heads, Pandora ; tails, Hope. And heads it was.

Pandora had had a trained nurse, and eventually a governess. She had been the pet of Ken

and all his friends, as the years went on ; especially Rawdon Wells, three years older than Ken. The war had come. She had thought her heart would burst when she had to say good-bye to them both ; and a strange secret about herself had suddenly become clear to her in that moment. She had been hardly sixteen then, yet it seemed to her that suddenly she had turned from a ' flapper ' into a grown woman.

Later she had seen Rawdon Wells come back, after a motor smash at the front. He had been left slightly lame, and was ' out of the war ' for good. She—Pan—had had to comfort him in dark hours when being left out of everything had seemed worse than death to a man of his temperament. Life had been grim yet passionately worth living in those days—till Evelyn Carroll came over from America, like the conceited thing she was, to help win the war ! After that, all had been hatefully different.

' I can't find Evie anywhere ! ' said Haste.

The girl turned with a start, and saw him at the door. It was like waking from a dream. She had been so far away that for an instant she wondered where she was, and what had happened. But in a second she remembered—remembered more than she wished to remember. She stared wide-eyed at Ken.

' I've been all over the place downstairs,' he

went on. 'It's begun to rain hard, so she can't have gone out. I thought she might have come back in here, but as she hasn't I suppose she must have gone upstairs. I——'

'Why don't you ring and have her maid down?' asked Pan. She had turned her eyes from Ken's face now. Yet she knew that he was frowning in a worried way. Anywhere else, it would be laughable for a man to worry because he didn't know where his wife was in the house, after a few moments' absence. But here—with that story. And—with she knew—she, Pandora—the thing she could not tell!

'No, I'll run up myself and fetch her. I expect she went to her room to look for some music that hasn't been unpacked.'

Haste had forgotten his annoyance—it hardly amounted to anger after all—with Pan. Poor little thing, she was only a jealous, passionate child, with who knew what wild blood lighting her gipsy eyes? It was not about her dream, of course, and that 'something more' which she couldn't tell. She had wanted to come—and she was saving her face by making a mystery. Still——

He went into his own dressing-room, where his luggage had been placed. A door led into the next room, and Ken tapped, his heart beating fast. Eve's room—his wife's room! It was wonderful, almost too good to be true. Yet it

was true. She must be there. In an instant he would hear her voice telling him he might come to her.

But no answer followed his tap. He knocked again. Silence at first, then a sharp sound as of a piece of furniture falling. Haste flung the door wide open, and looked into a beautiful, brightly-lighted room—the room which for many generations had been given to the brides of Hidden Hall Court.

Eve was not there. No one was there. But near a great oriel window a chair lay on the polished floor.

Ken tried to laugh, ashamed of himself because an old legend had got on his nerves. Eve must be hiding from him behind the half-drawn curtains of wonderful Spanish brocade. He walked straight across the room and jerked back the heavy folds of silk. A woman gave a shamed, choked cry, and resigned herself to being caught.

‘Miss Gillett!’ Haste almost gasped.

She stepped out of the embrasure, making the best of the inevitable: a handsome young woman of about twenty-eight, tall and strongly built, aquiline of feature, with eyes that were remarkable rather than beautiful. Though her thick, straight hair and brows were black, the eyes were so pale a blue that they looked white, darkly rimmed. This, and the classic cut of nose, mouth

and chin, gave her an odd resemblance to a statue 'come alive.' She wore the dress of a nurse, for she was still doing hospital work.

Colour streaming over her pale face, she smiled, and showed teeth almost too perfect. 'I'm not a thief—or a Hun spy!' she said, not quite steadily, though she had been great in air raids. 'I beg your pardon for being in your wife's room, and I've no right to be here, of course. Yet I have a right to come to the Court. If I've never told you, it—it was because I suppose I'm such a snob. My mother is Sir Rawdon's housekeeper. He knows. But he keeps his mouth shut—even with his best friends—about his own and other people's affairs. I—I came down on leave to see my mother! And—well, you can guess why I chose just this time! You can guess why I was tempted—drawn—compelled—to look at—your wife's room.'

'I'd rather not guess,' Ken said hurriedly.

Fanny Gillett's flush faded, and left her sickly white. Her eyes flashed. 'Well,' she choked, 'you don't need to guess. We've gone all through that. So much the worse for me. So much the better for Miss Carroll—I mean Mrs. Haste! I thought there was no harm in coming for a peep—to torture myself—when no one was here. But when I heard you knock I——'

'But some one was here,' Haste broke in. 'My

wife. She must have been. She's nowhere else. I'm looking for her.'

A curious expression suddenly made Fanny Gillett seem years older. She had nursed Captain Haste back to health after a dangerous wound, and had certainly helped to save his life. He had been grateful, and had told her so—unfortunately, because his words had opened the floodgates of a secret, passionate heart. There had been a scene which left his nerves raw; but he would not have been a man with red blood in his veins if he had not kept a certain tenderness for the strong, hard, brave girl who loved him. He had reproached Eve once for saying Miss Gillett had a cruel face, but now, suddenly, he thought the same.

'I hope the history of this house isn't going to repeat itself!' she said.

A wave of anger swept over Haste. He felt that he hated the woman. He knew she would be glad if Eve were dead.

In a rage he pulled the old-fashioned bell-rope again and again. Miss Gillett rushed from the room, and when a maid came running, he was alone.

The servant stared at him, frightened.

'Call Mrs. Haste's maid,' he said. 'I must speak to her. Quick; please!'

He felt that he could not bear the suspense;

1443.

for suddenly it had become actual suspense. He was afraid—icily afraid of something—he could not have told what.

Ken stood still, waiting, in the room where Eve's pretty things were already scattered about; her monogrammed gold toilet things on the dressing table, a film of white lace and a soft fluff of pink chiffon and silk on the bed, which must be a fairy-like 'nighty,' and a *robe de chambre*.

'My God, if anything has happened to her in this hateful place!' he muttered, half aloud. Then footsteps came hurrying along outside the door; and somewhere in the distance a woman screamed.

THE sound of the scream released some force within Haste which his will had kept pent up. It was as if the power of a cataract had broken through vast thicknesses of ice.

Ken had not let himself acknowledge that he was actually afraid. Then, suddenly, he was overwhelmed with fear, sickened by it.

Something horrible had happened to Eve! That scream said so. Whatever it was had been discovered, and some woman had cried out. He dreaded to know the truth, yet he felt that he must learn it at once, lest his heart burst. Flinging open the door, he met Evie's maid. It must have been her footsteps which had come running along the hall.

'Oh, Josephine!' he heard himself say, wondering vaguely that he had a voice left. 'Then it wasn't you who screamed?'

'No, Monsieur le Capitaine,' the Frenchwoman panted. 'I—I do not know who screamed. I came quickly from below. We were dining

Mademoiselle—I mean Madame—she is not ill ? ’

‘ My God ! Is there nobody who can tell me anything ! ’ groaned Haste, and flung away without answering the question.

He thought—so far as he was capable of thinking—that the sound of the scream had come from the floor below, and he dashed downstairs, two steps at a time. Yes, he was right. A woman was in hysterics, jabbering between sobs and gaspings for breath. A man’s voice and a girl’s mingled in trying to soothe her. The girl’s voice was Pan’s. The man’s he did not recognize, nor trouble his mind with the effort to do so.

Like a sleepwalker beginning to wake, he wandered on past the dining-room, where he and Eve had talked together so happily a little while—only a little while—ago, and went into the music-room adjoining. It was empty, but a door that he had not seen in the panelling was open. There was a light beyond—and the voices.

‘ Oh, I knew—I knew something would happen ! I didn’t want them to come here ! ’ the wailing woman moaned.

‘ Do be silent. You’re making a fool of yourself ! ’ Pandora said sharply. ‘ It may not be——’

Kennedy Haste felt as if a hand gripped his throat as he walked through that deep doorway in the thick, old wall.

The room on the other side was small, octagonal in shape, and hung with tapestry. He had never seen it before; but he hardly thought of this. His eyes went straight to a group huddled together close to the opposite wall. Above their heads, classic tapestry faces smirked against a dim background of old greens and blues. Pandora was there with the magnificent Italian butler, and a woman of middle age whom Haste had never seen.

‘What are you talking about?’ he heard himself demand roughly.

All three turned with a start of surprise. They had been too deeply absorbed to hear him coming, and evidently their nerves had suffered a severe shock.

It was Pan who answered; but it was at the woman Haste looked. He hardly saw the girl, or the dignified old man with the dark Italian brows and silver hair. The panic fear on the woman’s pale face fascinated him. She stared with wide-open black eyes into his, as if stricken by the sound of his voice.

‘Who are you?’ he asked sharply.

The woman’s lips parted, but she appeared unable to answer. Pan spoke for her. ‘This is Mrs. Gillett,’ she explained. ‘Don’s housekeeper—Fanny Gillett’s mother. The butler—Marianti—found this panel in the wall pushed back, between

the music-room and this one—the tapestry boudoir, I think it's called. That surprised him because—because it isn't a door anyone knew about. Then—he saw something here on the floor. And—and he thought he ought to call Mrs. Gillett. He's new to the house, and——'

'What did he see?' Ken broke in on the halting explanation.

He took a step nearer, but Pandora almost flung herself upon him, pushing him back with both hands on his breast. 'Don't come, Ken!' she cried. 'Not now—not suddenly, like this!'

Haste swung the girl off her feet and set her behind him. Instantly and respectfully the butler made way for his master's guest.

On the polished floor, close to the wall, was a man's footprint, clearly marked in liquid red. There were also a few crimson drops sprinkled near, as if they had dripped from a wound; for the red fluid was certainly blood.

'Oh, I wish I hadn't seen it!' sobbed the woman. 'It was cruel to bring me here to look at such horrors!'

Haste gave her one glance. Strange, if she were Rawdon Wells' housekeeper, he had never before had a glimpse of her. Before the war he had often come down for week-ends at Hidden Hall Court. There had been an old housekeeper in those days, a relic of Rawdon's father's time. Suspiciously Ken

told himself that there was mystery about the nervous, haunted-looking creature—who must have been a beauty once. And Fanny Gillett was her daughter! Why should the two have schemed to get a footing in this house before the wedding?—for they must have schemed! Could their plan have any connexion—but the thought broke before the rush of another, more insistent. This was the room—this tapestry boudoir—whence the tragic bride of Hidden Hall Court had vanished, years and years ago!

‘There must be a concealed door behind the tapestry just here,’ he said, ‘or that footprint wouldn’t be where it is, close to the wall.’

‘It is so, I was tinkering, sare,’ ventured Marianti, the butler, in understandable English, though with a strong accent. ‘I send for ze ’ouse-keeper, Madame ’ere, because she know if zere is secret way out of zis room.’

‘I know nothing of the kind!’ exclaimed Mrs. Gillett. And turning again to Haste, she added, ‘I’ve been here only a few months. Sir Rawdon was acquainted with my family. When his old housekeeper had to retire on account of her age, he engaged me——’

‘What does all that matter?’ Haste cut in, desperately. ‘There must be a door here, I tell you! I’m going to find it. There’s no use now trying to keep back the truth from anyone. My

wife has disappeared—not of her own accord. Something has happened to her. There’s been foul play——’

‘Don’t say that, Ken!’ Pandora begged. ‘You can’t be sure. She may be playing you a trick——’

‘You’d not dream that Eve would do such a cruel thing, if you’d ever liked her or done her justice,’ Haste reproached the girl bitterly.

‘If ze gentleman permit me, I help ’im look for ze door be’ind ze tapestry,’ the butler quietly said. ‘I came from a great ’ouse in Italy, sare, famous ’ouse wiz many secret sings hidden. I ’ave experience.’

‘Help me, then, for heaven’s sake,’ Haste said. He felt a vague impulse of gratitude to the handsome old man, who seemed to him at that dreadful moment the one intelligent, dependable person at hand.

Between the wide panels of tapestry which covered the whole wall of the octagon room (save for the two windows and one door set in oak) ran narrow strips of the ancient wood, beautifully carved, dividing the sections. Two of the latter were occupied by long and exquisite windows, with leaded glass like delicately set jewels, and one by a door, carved to match the carving of the strips of oak between the sections. All the rest was tapestry as old as Queen Elizabeth. Ken watched the Italian as he began running his fingers lightly

yet purposefully over the carved fruits and flowers, and quaint, gargoyle-like faces on the strip of oak nearest the footprint.

‘It must be here, some spring, some catch,’ he muttered in his native tongue, forgetting in excitement the acquired language of which he was proud. ‘It is hard to find, yes, because if it were not, everybody would discover it, and there would be no secret to puzzle people for centuries. But—I shall find it—with patience.’

Haste had been a close friend of Rawdon Wells for too many years not to have picked up a little Italian. He understood the old man’s mutterings, and hung upon his words with growing trust.

‘Ah!’ Marianti cried suddenly. As he spoke a strange thing happened. He must—perhaps inadvertently at the last—have touched the spring he groped for. The tapestry panel, in front of which was the footprint, began to move out from the wall after the manner of an awning, remaining fast at the top, but protruding more and more from the bottom so that, as the butler continued to press a carved acorn which controlled it, the tapestry rose higher than the watchers’ heads, being held up on either side by a thin metal support. An acrid smell of dust came to Haste’s nostrils. But even at that instant of strong emotion it flashed through his brain that there should have been more dust.

Evidently this secret exit had been used more than once of late.

The tapestry was lined with canvas, darkened by age, and underneath, in oak much paler than the rest, because not exposed to air or light, was a low door—an evil-looking, sinister door it seemed to Haste.

‘Ah, zare is more of it!’ gasped the Italian poking his white head forward beneath the shadow of the sloped tapestry. ‘See ’ere, sare! It is wat I expect.’

‘More of—what?’ stammered Haste. But he guessed the answer before it came.

‘Blood, sare, blood!’ said Marianti, making room for Haste by his side.

He was right. On the oak, close to and all over the visible spring which was a substitute for a door knob, was the mark in red of a hand: thumb, four fingers, and the outer cushions of the palm. ‘Zis ought not be touched, sare,’ the old man went on. ‘Eet is for ze police. Zay can tell——’

‘But it must be touched!’ Ken cut in. ‘We’ll avoid destroying the traces if we can, but I’ve got to open that door and see what’s on the other side!’

The butler stood respectfully aside. Haste pressed the spring, vaguely conscious that other servants had come to the door of the octagon room and were standing crowded together in awed

silence on the threshold. Eve's maid, Josephine, was there ; and over the shoulders of the huddled woman the head of a taller woman craned—Fanny Gillett.

Ken had not realized that strength had gone out of him, until he tried to push that spring embedded in a depression half-way up the secret door. But his arm was shaking, and his hand was clumsily stiff, as if frozen. The thought that he must touch fresh blood, not yet dry—Eve's blood, perhaps!—made him deathly faint for the first time in his life. Even when he had been badly wounded in the war he hadn't felt like that !

But the spring yielded. The door slid back into the wall, showing a recess and a circular stone stairway leading down into darkness.

'I vill get candles, sare,' offered Marianti. 'One of zose silver candelabra from ze dinner-table——'

'Wait !' broke in Haste. 'What's this ?' He was peering into the dimness of the wall-recess. 'Some one seems to have installed electricity here.' He pressed a button, and to the surprise of those who looked on flooded the staircase with light.

It was then that vague suspicion became certainty in his mind. Who could have had electric light put into this hidden place, except the master of the house who knew its secrets—Rawdon Wells,

who had loved Eve, and implored her to spend her honeymoon under his roof?

Rawdon was supposed now to be in Liverpool waiting for the ship on which he would sail early to-morrow morning for New York. But with a rush of black hatred Ken told himself that the proposed trip was camouflage. Heaven knew how long Wells must have been planning this coup! But clever as he thought himself, he hadn't covered his tracks. What about the finger-marks and the footprints?

'Shall I go down wiz you, sare?' asked Marianti.

Haste did not answer, did not even hear. He began to descend the circular staircase. The butler hesitated for an instant, and then followed.

Fanny Gillett had pushed past the servants and come into the room. She stood by her mother, and slipped an arm round the waist of the shivering woman.

'Oh, I felt—I felt something would happen if they came here!' moaned the housekeeper. 'You know what I have seen!'

'Shut up!' Fanny whispered sharply. 'They're all listening.' She threw a glance at Pandora Haste, for Pandora disliked her and she disliked Pandora. But the girl was staring at the red footprint on the floor as if hypnotized. She had

not heard that speech of the housekeeper's. And she had told nobody yet of the handkerchief she had found, with the strange odour on it, mingling with Eve's own perfume.

AT the foot of the circular stairs was a door. Haste opened it, and saw a passage of undistinguishable length. It was dark, but another electric button at the entrance flooded the place with light, showing walls, floor and roof of stone. All was very clean, and there was apparently no lack of ventilation. Haste walked on for a dozen yards, his shoulders touching the sides of the corridor, which must, he thought, have been built into the immense thickness of the house wall. At the end was a third door. This also was operated by a spring. Haste pressed and, the door sliding back, he stood on the threshold of a brightly lit room.

A man turned at the click of the spring, and the two stared into each other's eyes.

'Good heavens, Rawdon Wells!' Ken cried, 'you here?'

'Why not?' the other challenged. 'This is my laboratory.'

'You were supposed to be on board ship, sailing for America,' Haste said dully.

‘I beg your pardon,’ Wells answered. ‘My ship doesn’t sail till to-morrow. I shall be on her in time. I have my car, and I’m just ready to start.’

He had apparently thrown off his first annoyance at the sudden intrusion of his friend. His face relaxed—an extremely handsome dark face, with eagle features, and splendid brown eyes under long, arched brows that dreamily contradicted the fierce energy of other features. He smiled a very pleasant disarming smile. But it did not disarm Haste, who continued to stare and frown.

‘You’ll not start till you’ve shown me where my wife is, and I’ve made sure no harm has come to her,’ Ken said. ‘What have you done with Eve?’

‘What have I done with Eve?’ Rawdon Wells echoed, utter blankness on his face, ‘I don’t know what you mean!’

Haste had spoken from the threshold. Now he walked into the room. He had always been curious about Don’s laboratory, which was never shown to anyone, even intimate friends like himself; but now he entered unseeingly, hardly aware, despite all the paraphernalia of the chemist, that he was in a laboratory. His nostrils, however, noted a peculiar odour of burning, as he strode in and stopped close to Wells.

‘You do know what I mean,’ he said; ‘there’s no use pretending. The whole thing’s been a

monstrous plot. You invited us here—you almost insisted on lending your house—just for this.’

Wells’ face hardened. ‘Just for what?’

‘I ask again—what have you done with Eve? Tell me the truth, or by heaven, I’ll choke it out of you!’

‘Ken, you’re mad!’ cried the other. ‘You can choke nothing out of me. Two can play at the choking game, if it comes to that, but we’re not fools, so why should it? I tell you I haven’t seen Eve since the wedding. I motored down here, because——’

‘Ah! Why?’

‘Because I had business—something to clear up before leaving.’

‘Yet you let every one believe you were going straight to Liverpool.’

‘There’s nothing in that. Whether I went straight to Liverpool or came down to my own house was my affair.’

‘While the house was lent to us, it was ours. But all that’s piffle! I know you’ve got Eve hidden somewhere. Whether it’s just a ghastly practical joke you’re playing, or whether you’ve done away with her because she was mine, not yours, I don’t know yet, but I will know! We found a footprint in blood which led us to the secret door behind the tapestry—and then red finger-marks, not dry yet—God! if you’ve killed her!’

Rawdon Wells' tanned olive skin seemed to fade.

'You believe such a thing of me!' he broke out.

'I thought we were friends!'

'So did I. But now I know we're enemies.'

'Very well,' the other said, 'the footprint you speak of isn't mine, nor the finger-marks. I'd die a hundred deaths sooner than hurt a hair of Eve Carroll's head. If harm's come to her in this house (I won't take anything of the sort for granted yet!), it's as much a mystery to me as to you. And whether we're to be friends or enemies, you're bound to give me the benefit of the doubt.'

'The benefit of the doubt!' Haste bitterly echoed. With no other answer he walked about the room, examining everything, looking with mingled fear and eagerness for any sign that Eve had been brought into the laboratory, living or dead. Suddenly he sprang forward with a cry.

'Her handkerchief!' he cried, snatching up a bit of cambric and lace.

It had lain on a table, where Wells had flung his hat and gloves, and placed several packets of papers besides a legal-looking tin box; and it was at this table Rawdon had been standing when Haste burst into the room.

'Her monogram!' he said, 'and even without that I'd know it was Eve's by the perfume. It's the scent she always uses.'

'It is her handkerchief, I grant you,' Rawdon

admitted, 'but I stole it when I said good-bye to her after her marriage with you to-day, Ken. It was to be a souvenir—the only one I have of her—except a few memories.

'Rot!' Ken flung at him. 'You expect me to believe that? You shall not leave this house, Wells. You shall not sail for America. I'm going to 'phone to the local police, and to London—to Scotland Yard, unless I find Eve alive and well within the next fifteen minutes. The police will know whether those marks up above are made by your foot and your fingers—and whether that—that red stuff is human blood.'

'That's exactly what I would suggest,' said Rawdon Wells, speaking more quietly as he got himself under control. 'If you don't find Eve within the next few minutes you should certainly call in the police. As it's my house and I invited you both here, I should insist on you doing that, even if you didn't wish it yourself. Of course, if she's not found, I shan't dream of sailing. But she will be found. The days of dreadful happenings in this house are over centuries ago, if there ever were any except in legend. There's nothing mysterious about the place now, and——'

'You say that, when I've just broken into your laboratory—which you'd never let anyone see—broken in through a secret door, coming down a secret stairway!'

‘All very old houses have secret passages or rooms,’ said Wells. ‘It has amused me to utilize this old cellar. But there’s another way down to the laboratory, quite open and frank——’

‘What do I care? Don’t let’s stand arguing,’ Ken cut him short. ‘I’ll do what you ask. I’ll give you the “benefit of the doubt”—for fifteen minutes. But what about the blood?’

‘I don’t know. I can’t form a theory yet,’ Wells said. ‘Perhaps it isn’t blood.’

‘I pray God it’s not. But it almost certainly is!’ Haste groaned. ‘Come up with me. But I warn you, Wells, I don’t mean to let you out of my sight for an instant.’

‘I don’t ask you to—I don’t wish it,’ answered Rawdon. But he was pale, and his eyes showed trouble—guilt perhaps, or so Haste judged.

As if to prove the truth of his assertion, the master of the house led his guest (what a mockery the word seemed!) up to the ground floor by another way. As he had said, there was nothing hidden about it. A door led from the laboratory into an antechamber and thence to a large open cellar. There, everyday objects could be seen in the electric light which Wells switched on; a huge modern furnace for the central heating which he had installed; big compartments for storing wood and coals; an apparatus for heating baths; doors labelled ‘Wine’ and ‘Mineral Waters’; stone

stairways leading in different directions. All appeared commonplace and comfortable, except for one detail. Though the month was July and the weather warm, there was a furious fire in the furnace, evidently not long kindled, for it was here apparently that the very peculiar smoke and odour of burning had originated. A frightful thought shot through Haste's brain, which turned him sick; and as Wells led the way to the farthest staircase, he turned and rushed back to fling open the furnace door. His hand was scorched by the hot iron of the handle, and involuntarily he flinched from the fiery blast which almost scared his eyeballs.

The heat was intolerable, and seemed to be generated by masses of indescribable stuff which had been heaped within, on a bed of coals and wood.

'What have you been burning here?' Haste rapped out.

Wells turned at the foot of the stairs.

'Oh, odds and ends!' he said.

'Odds and ends!' echoed Ken. 'I can see some great bundle on the fire, like a shadow in the red. There's a smell like burning leather.'

'That's just what it is,' Wells answered quickly. 'I shoved in a leather bag full of letters and all sorts of things.'

Kennedy Haste made no answer, but his heart

was sick, and his throat ached with the dumbness of his horror, his fear that could find no words. He closed the door of the furnace, for nothing could be touched or clearly seen within the sea of flame. But on the floor close by something attracted his attention, almost as if a ghostly finger had tapped him on the shoulder and then pointed down.

Some small pink object rather like a faded rose, lay on the grey flagging. He stooped quickly and picked it up; a bit of coral satin ribbon it was, with a few loops of crystal bead fringe attached to one end. The other end was jaggedly charred.

Evidently some garment to which it was attached had been stuffed into the furnace, and this little piece of ribbon had hung outside the shut door. When the rest had burnt up it had dropped, or else it had fallen when Ken opened the furnace to look in.

Deathly cold despite the heat, Haste recalled Eve in the dress she had worn for dinner. He was not a man who noticed or could describe a woman's clothes at all accurately; yet he knew that Eve had been in white, with tulle sleeves that had floated out like an angel's wings as she moved. But hadn't there been something pink about the dress? Pink was Eve's favourite colour. Nearly always she contrived to have a touch of rose about her things, and that intoxicating perfume of hers was like roses, on a hot summer night under the

moon—roses with an Eastern spice and lusciousness.

What had been the rose-touch to-night? Oh, a sash!

Yes, she had had a soft pink sash swathed round her waist, with a rose stuck into it that came to the top of her low bodice, and brushed her beautiful white neck. The man's head reeled giddily as he thought of her loveliness—and that she was lost to him. He believed that to be so now; that she was lost. Only an hour ago—less—she had smiled at him as she slipped through the door on her way to the music-room. His heart had almost burst with joy at the thought that she was his. And she had gone, never to come back—gone where he could not follow this side of the grave. He would never see her in this world again.

The thought that Rawdon Wells had robbed him of her—killed her cruelly and deliberately in this wicked house—was so strong that Haste could hardly restrain himself. He had loved Rawdon once, admired him beyond all other men, and they had gone into the war together, though Rawdon's smash up had come soon after.

But now he hated his friend of other days so hotly that it was all he could do not to spring on him, seize him from behind, and beat his brain out on the stone floor.


Something, however, restrained him. Possibly it was Rawdon's limp which once, in so splendid a

specimen of manhood, had seemed horribly pathetic to Ken. Or, possibly it was the recollection of Wells' words, 'Give me the benefit of the doubt.'

He had promised to give that benefit, and he would keep his word—for a little while yet. Indeed, as his head cleared, Ken realized that nothing would be gained at this stage by killing Rawdon Wells. It wasn't certain—not quite certain yet!—that he had caused Eve to disappear, though circumstantial evidence of many kinds gathered thickly round him. If Haste killed Rawdon Wells he would be put in prison, and could not work at unravelling the mystery. That was the most important thing of all at present: to be free!—

Without a word he slipped into his pocket the charred bit of pink satin ribbon, with its tag of gay, glittering fringe, and followed Rawdon upstairs.

There was just one consolation, he told himself. Wells could not escape.



THE stairs led into a long, stone-paved corridor which branched off from the main hall. But it could be left or entered by a door that opened into an exterior court, known as the 'Dutch Tree Court.' Rawdon, no doubt, had a key to this door, Haste reflected, and could easily have let himself in, to go down to his laboratory, unseen by the servants. He could then have come up by the secret way, and reached the music-room while Eve was playing. Afterwards—but Ken tried not to think yet what might have happened afterwards. He had not seen the handkerchief which Pandora had picked up near the piano. He knew nothing of that, nor of the odd odour which mingled on it with Eve's perfume. He knew only of the handkerchief he had found in Rawdon Wells' laboratory. Otherwise, the strangeness of the fact that Eve should drop two handkerchiefs, one after another, might have puzzled him.

'Now I want you to 'phone to the police station at Ardry-le-Mare, as you suggested,' Rawdon

said. 'Unless you'd prefer to have me do it. Or will you wait until we've gone through the whole house and grounds?'

'I'll do it myself, thank you,' answered Haste. 'And I won't wait for any further search before 'phoning—though search shall be made, of course. I'm too sure now that nothing good will come of it, to risk longer delay in getting the police.'

As he spoke he kept his eyes upon the other's face. It had become hard as a classic mask, and did not change.

'The local police won't feel themselves equal to this,' Rawdon said. 'They'll want to throw the responsibility on Scotland Yard. But they'd think themselves insulted if you 'phoned the Yard without warning them. You may as well make the concession. It won't cause any real delay. The minute word reaches Sergeant Anson of what has happened here, he'll get cold feet. They have about as much awe of Hidden Hall Court at Ardryle-Mare as you and I have of high heaven!'

Wells spoke in a queer, impersonal way, as if he were outside the case, though Haste knew he must be aware that evidence, at least, was all against him. 'Perhaps he has some card up his sleeve,' Ken thought hopefully. 'Maybe he's so wild at my suspecting him that he'll spring the surprise only when the police come. There may be some secret of the house—some trap Eve's fallen

into—not fatal. Rawdon may know it's going to turn out all right at last.'

Wells opened a door at the end of the corridor, and the two men found themselves in the great hall. Haste realized then how short a time he had been gone, for the same group of servants still crowded round the door of the music-room. At sight of him they backed away, and their faces betrayed such intense surprise at seeing Sir Rawdon, that it was clear none knew of his presence. Then Pandora ran out into the hall, and gave a little cry as she saw Wells.

'I—so you haven't gone to America!' she stammered, interrupting herself, and cutting short some sentence she had decided not to utter.

'Ken thinks I've kidnapped Eve,' Rawdon answered, with a kind of defiance. 'Or else—that I've killed her.'

'Don't say such things!' the girl begged.

'Why not? He'll be saying them to the police soon,' Wells prophesied.

'The police!' Pan almost whispered the words.

'Unless you've found out something while I was gone,' Ken anxiously suggested.

'No,' she said, 'we've found out nothing. Only—Mrs. Gillett has been telling us about ghosts—terrible ghosts here at the Court.'

Ken turned away to order a search to be made, and then to go to the telephone, which was in

the library. It struck him that Pan had seemed more distressed than surprised to see Rawdon. Could she possibly have known that he intended coming to Hidden Hall Court to-night, instead of going to Liverpool from town? She had known something which she hadn't wished to tell. Her obstinate determination to follow him—Ken—to the Court was connected with that mysterious 'something.'

'She'll be obliged to give up all she knows to the police,' he thought rather grimly, as he looked for the number he wanted. 'If anyone in this house has a secret, it's bound to come out.'

Ardry-le-Mare, the nearest village (which called itself a town), was about four miles from Hidden Hall Court; but in less than half an hour a sergeant of police and two constables had rumbled up to the door of the Court in a small old-fashioned motor-car. Meanwhile, a thorough search of the house had been made, and as far as possible of the grounds; that is, the lawns and gardens, the various summer-houses, even the stables, the new garage, and the two very old cottages of lodge-keepers. There was no trace of Eve anywhere. She might have been touched by some fairy wand, and suddenly made invisible.

Haste had meant to accuse Rawdon Wells in fierce, direct words the moment the police arrived. But somehow he did not. He hardly knew why,

unless those words 'the benefit of the doubt' were still ringing in his ears. The time for doubt seemed to have gone. But, after all, Rawdon couldn't get away save by killing himself, with one of his own wonderful poisons perhaps; so let the police find out the truth by questioning every one in turn. That would be fair; and it would amount to the same thing in the end.

Wells was inclined to keep to the background and let Haste play master of the house, but Sergeant Anson could not understand that line of proceeding. As Rawdon had said, Hidden Hall Court was like high heaven to Ardry-le-Mare; but this was not because of the grandeur of the old house, or its riches. It was because of 'the family.'

Sergeant Anson, as a boy of nineteen, had volunteered for the Boer War, and served under Sir Rawdon's father. In 1914 he had offered himself again 'for the fighting,' and had been a sergeant in Captain Sir Rawdon Wells' regiment before the accident which put Wells out of the war. Just because Sir Rawdon had lent his house to a honeymoon couple (as every one in Ardry-le-Mare knew he had done), Anson wasn't going to have a stranger acting as spokesman with him, in Sir Rawdon's place.

'I shall be obliged, sir, if you'll come too,' he said, when Wells curtly proposed that Captain

Haste should explain matters in the library, unembarrassed by his host's presence.

'But, sergeant, he accuses me of a great crime,' Wells explained. 'And so——'

'As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter whether you're present or absent,' Ken broke in. 'I can't say more than I've said to you already.'

Rawdon shrugged his shoulders as he walked into the library with the sergeant of police and the man who had once been his best friend. He listened quietly to the questions and answers: heard all Ken's hastily built-up theory of a deliberate plot for revenge against a successful rival, and showed no emotion whatever until Ken produced the piece of half-burnt pink ribbon with the crystal fringe. Then he flushed a dark red, bit back some word at the end of his tongue, and took his lip between his teeth.

'You suspect Sir Rawdon Wells of—as you might say—luring the lady to his house and murdering her on her wedding night?' Anson summed up, glowering at Haste. 'Killing her somehow or other while she was playing on the piano in the music-room, with you in the next room, and both doors open; then taking the body by a secret way down to the cellar, and burning it in the furnace where he'd lighted a huge fire on purpose; he thinking to escape in his own motor-car to Liver-

pool, without anyone suspecting—if all had gone well—that he'd been near the place ?'

'Yes, roughly, that expresses what I suspect,' Ken answered with dull obstinacy. 'My wife's disappearance—the blood marks—her handkerchief in the laboratory—this bit of charred silk—the great furnace fire on a July night—Sir Rawdon Wells' refusal to explain his presence here, and his evasive answers about what he had burned—everything points to one horrible conclusion——'

'Because Sir Rawdon gave evasive answers to you, sir, is no reason why he should to me,' said Anson. 'Though'—turning to Wells—'I'm bound to warn you, sir, that anything you may say——'

'Oh, I know all that stuff, sergeant,' Wells cut in. 'And I'm not going to say anything except this. I didn't kidnap Mrs. Haste. I didn't murder her. I haven't seen her since the wedding. I had no intention of coming down to the Court when I invited her and Captain Haste to spend their honeymoon here. The business that brought me cropped up later. It was important—but entirely private : didn't concern Captain or Mrs. Haste in the least. The things I burnt in the furnace were connected with my business, but not with the Hastes. I've already explained that I brought the bride's handkerchief away with me as a souvenir. Not much harm in that ! I haven't yet seen the footprint and finger marks in the music-

room near the secret door. But there's one thing certain about them ; they're not mine, and the sooner I can prove that the better I shall be pleased.'

'The footprint can be tested at once, sir,' said Anson. 'As for the finger marks, they'll require an expert. I—I'm not sure we have any one competent——'

'You'll 'phone to Scotland Yard, I hope, immediately,' Ken cut him short. 'There's not a second to waste. I hope to Heaven that by this time one of your men has—has looked to the furnace—has found out——' he stammered and broke down.

'That is being attended to, sir,' Anson replied, sympathetically enough ; yet he was almost involuntarily watching Sir Rawdon Wells as if for a 'lead.' From the story Captain Haste had poured out, suspicion against Sir Rawdon—secretly Anson's idol and hero—appeared hideously well-founded. The sergeant knew that there was, and had been for generations, a 'wild streak' in the men of Hidden Hall Court. More than once, strange, mysterious tragedies had happened in the old house. Sir Rawdon's mother had been an Italian, very beautiful, but of a passionate temper which had not made for happiness. And to-night was not the first time Anson had heard that Sir Rawdon Wells was desperately in love with the

American heiress, Miss Carroll. Gossip had reached Ardry-le-Mare, where every one was interested in Sir Rawdon's affairs. People had talked. They had been sorry for 'poor Sir Rawdon.' It was supposed that his suddenly-arranged trip to America was for the purpose of 'forgetting'; but to forget would be difficult for a man of his type. Ever since he was a boy Rawdon Wells had felt deeply, and 'taken things hard.'

Anson knew his duty to the public as its servant. All the same, he didn't much like the job of bringing Scotland Yard into the business. These fellows wouldn't care whether they found Sir Rawdon guilty, or some one else. All they would think of was the d——d case!

Rawdon saw what was in the man's mind, and smiled rather bitterly. 'I, too, hope you'll 'phone Scotland Yard,' he said. 'Ardry-le-Mare shouldn't have the responsibility of an affair like this, though I believe it would keep its end up with London, if need be.'

'I will use the telephone if you'll permit me,' said Anson, vaguely addressing both men. 'I'll 'phone our place and get them to call up the Yard. It's late now, after eleven. But there'll probably be a detective down—a finger-print expert and all that—first thing to-morrow.'

'Now for that footprint,' Rawdon said, when the telephone had been duly used. 'I suppose I'm

intelligent enough, if I'd stained my boots with blood, to burn them in that furnace fire, and change to another pair. But I'm waiting and anxious to measure those I have on, or any others in my wardrobe upstairs, with the print in the music-room.'

'Very well, sir, I was going to suggest it,' replied Anson uneasily. 'I can take the depositions of the other members of the household later. This is—er—important.'

He opened the door of the library, just in time to collide with one of his own constables.

'Beg pardon, sir!' exclaimed the man, respectfully dodging his superior. 'I've finished my examination of the contents of the furnace.'

'Well, what's the report?' Anson inquired brusquely, under the haggard gaze of Kennedy Haste.

'The report is, sir, remains of a travelling bag, contents mostly undistinguishable, but apparently materials: some hooks and eyes, might have been on a woman's dress; something like a silver shoe buckle with blackened stones or paste set in it; and a pair of men's boots, nearly destroyed.'

'Is that all?' asked Anson, when his assistant stopped and cleared his throat.

'Not quite all, sir.'

'What else did you find?'

'A—a quantity of bones.'

‘ Human bones ? ’

‘ They—they have that appearance, sir.’

Everything turned purple before the eyes of Kennedy Haste. He caught at the back of a chair, and then fell, rather than dropped, into it, the world blotted out.

POLICE-SERGEANT ANSON had had a secret, almost unconscious sense of resentment against Captain Haste for his black suspicion of Sir Rawdon Wells, until the young man crumpled up in a fainting fit. Then he realized that the guest of Hidden Hall Court had gone through an ordeal such as few men are ever called upon to bear. He found himself intensely sorry for the poor fellow ; but at the same time, as events seemed likely to turn, Captain Haste would be spared further martyrdom by being ' out, of it all ' for a while.

His adopted sister was called in to minister to him ; and Miss Gillett, hearing what had happened, announced herself as a trained nurse. ' He has acknowledged that I saved his life in France,' she said. ' I think you had better let me go to him now.'

The sergeant thought so, too, and gave permission. His assistant and Rawdon Wells together carried Haste—who looked like a dead man—from the chair to a great Chesterfield sofa, where Miss

Gillett directed them to 'lay him down flat—no cushion under his head.'

Meanwhile, the police investigation had to go on, and was therefore transferred to another room—one adjoining the great library. This was known as 'Sir Rawdon's den,' but in preparation for guests and his departure for America it had been straightened almost to primness of order.

Anson gave precedence to such witnesses as he thought likely to possess the most valuable information, and in this order the new butler, Marianti, came first. It was he who had seen one of the wall-panels in the music-room open, and had stepped through into the 'tapestry boudoir,' where he had discovered the blood-stained footprint and other marks. He was the ideal servant, though a foreigner, Anson thought, and far more worthy of his place at Hidden Hall Court than his predecessor had been. The latter had often strolled into Ardryle-Mare, 'a smug, smooth-faced old toad,' the police sergeant apostrophized him mentally in retrospect, and with no end of an opinion of himself. He had 'put on airs' with his equals and cringed to his superiors. No one had liked Davis; but it was supposed that he had been kept on because of long service with Sir Rawdon's father. Everybody had been surprised when he left, and the reason for his going was unknown. But the change was all for the good, it seemed; and Anson

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silently admired the dignity of Marianti, his reluctance to utter any word which might incriminate Sir Rawdon, and the evident pain he suffered when the latter volunteered to measure the sole of his own boot with the red footprint on the floor. The fine old face under its thatch of white hair almost shrivelled with dismay when the boot on Sir Rawdon's foot fitted the crimson outline without a fault. Marianti uttered a kind of gasping groan, as if he blamed himself for not washing away those tell-tale traces before they could incriminate the last of a noble family.

'By Jove, it fits!' exclaimed Rawdon. 'This makes things rather serious for me—unless Eve—Mrs. Haste—is found alive and well. I can't help believing she will be. That anything should happen to her—in my house—would be too horrible. But there's a plot of some sort against me. That's certain now—what with the burnt boots and the bones in the furnace—where I swear there was nothing of the sort when I put in the leather bag. And now this footprint! It must have been made with a boot or shoe of mine. But when the expert in finger-prints comes down from Scotland Yard—thank Heaven that'll be another story. People can't imitate one's finger-prints, can they?'

'I don't think so, sir,' said Anson.

'Then I shall be cleared. The finger-marks

will be a clue leading in some other direction. Where, we can't see yet.'

'No, sir, we can't see yet,' repeated the sergeant. But his heart was heavy as he took down his notes. He saw trouble ahead. He couldn't bear to believe Rawdon Wells guilty of a peculiarly repulsive crime, and yet—and yet—that suggestion of a 'plot' sounded somewhat far-fetched.

'Meanwhile, what's to be done?' Rawdon asked. 'I don't know much about such things at first hand. Do you want to arrest me? Because, if you do, I'll understand that it's your duty, and I shan't make a fuss.'

'Oh, no, sir, certainly not!' Anson protested. 'It's quite enough if I have your word not to leave the house.'

'You have that,' Wells returned promptly. 'Only force would get me out. I'm as anxious as you are—more so—for every development. I'm praying that Miss Car—Mrs. Haste, will be found. And as for Captain Haste—he hates me now, but the poor chap is almost insane with grief, and not responsible for suspecting his best friend.'

After Marianti, Tate, the chauffeur, who had driven Wells down from town, was interviewed without any exciting result. Then the housekeeper was summoned to tell what she knew, because Anson had heard from one of his constables (who had it in turn from a servant) that Mrs. Gillett had 'let

out some very queer things in her first fright.

The sergeant was human enough to enjoy questioning her, for his own impression confirmed what was said about her in the house—that she was a ‘very mysterious sort of person.’

She was dressed in mourning, with a narrow band of delicate white at neck and wrists, and with her long black gown, her black hair that had two wide streaks of silver, her dead white face and her large, tragic dark eyes, she was like a study in chalk and charcoal come alive. There was something odd in her manner as in her appearance, too: something jumpy and frightened, not just ordinarily nervous. She had the air of glancing over her shoulder to see who was behind her, when there was no one there; and her thin, beautifully-shaped hands clasped and unclasped each other. ‘Not at all the housekeeper for a great country house,’ Anson told himself. Yet Sir Rawdon had chosen her himself, he had heard, and no one had learned whence she came.

After all, the questions dragged very little from Mrs. Gillett. She explained the words she had been heard to say, about ‘expecting something to happen’—‘not wishing the honeymoon couple to come’—and ‘seeing things’ in the music-room and the tapestry boudoir.

‘I suppose I am what is called “psychic,”’ she said. ‘I have presentiments. I’m afraid of

them, because they so often come true—too often! And if there are ghosts about a house, I always see them. I felt trouble was sure, if Captain and Mrs. Haste spent their honeymoon here. I had a dream that frightened me. There's a ghost I've often seen since I came to live at Hidden Hall Court—a woman who walks out of the tapestry in that boudoir, and vanishes back into it. She has a wicked face. In my dream she attacked Mrs. Haste with a dagger. I told Sir Rawdon. I begged him to make some excuse about not being able to lend Captain Haste the place after all.'

Nothing that Anson was able to say could drag more than this from Mrs. Gillett: but if he had learned little that was enlightening about the disappearance of the bride, he had at least gained some rather surprising information about the woman herself. She was on such terms with Sir Rawdon Wells as to advise him concerning his private affairs! This made her seem more mysterious than ever. Then there was that daughter of hers, whose eyes betrayed a burning love for Captain Haste, and who had ventured down to visit her mother while the house was lent for Haste's honeymoon with another girl; in fact, on the wedding night.

By the time Anson had finished his unsatisfactory interview with Mrs. Gillett, Captain Haste had sufficiently recovered to free his volunteer

nurse. And Miss Gillett followed her mother into the 'den.'

'Are you willing to tell me why you came to visit here just at this time?' the police sergeant catechized her.

'Yes,' answered the V.A.D. without an instant's hesitation. 'I came because something forced me to make myself miserable. Miss Carroll wasn't worthy of Captain Haste. I wanted her to suffer, too. She wasn't worthy of any man's serious love. She was just a flirt—a vain little flirt. She'd been engaged—practically engaged—to Sir Rawdon Wells, but broke with him after she met Captain Haste. He—Captain Haste—didn't know there'd been an engagement. He wouldn't have believed it—against her word—unless it could be proved. And I—thought of a way of proving it here. I wanted them to quarrel. I felt it would be the best thing for him to know that girl for what she was—the sooner the better. That's why I came.'

As she spoke, Fanny Gillett looked Anson straight and boldly in the eyes. She was handsome. Her eyes and features were not unlike what her mother's must have been, but—there was some other resemblance. Anson tried to recall it, tried to account for it, but could not.

'Do you suggest that the pair had quarrelled?' he asked. 'That something had occurred which

drove Mrs. Haste to leave the house of her own accord ? ’

‘ I don’t think anything had had time to occur,’ Miss Gillett answered. ‘ I knew Sir Rawdon was keeping letters from Evelyn Carroll. I thought I could find them, and I meant to put some in Captain Haste’s dressing-room, where he’d be sure to see them. All’s fair in love and war ! I’m not ashamed of loving him. I saved his life. He would have cared for me if it hadn’t been for that—flirt.’

‘ You thought you could find letters,’ echoed Anson. ‘ Did you find them ? ’

‘ No. They were gone.’

‘ From where ? ’

‘ From this room. From a drawer in that desk where you’re sitting. I know they were there once. But I’m not going to tell you how I knew. It hasn’t anything to do with this affair. And I haven’t anything to do with it. But I’m glad Mrs. Haste has gone ! I hope for her husband’s sake some other infatuated man has carried her away, and that she’ll never come back into his life again.’

‘ Some other infatuated man ! ’ The police sergeant saw a maze twisting ahead of him. It seemed to him that there was some reason for suspecting that both these women—mother and daughter—knew more than he was able to get out of them.

He began to be thankful after all that a detective from London was coming down.

When he had dismissed Miss Gillett, he had Josephine in—Mrs. Haste's maid—who had come down by train in advance of her mistress. And the Frenchwoman's answer to his first question gave the old soldier an odd constriction of the throat.

'Yes, Monsieur, I do know something to make me suspect what has become of Mademoiselle—I mean Madame,' she said. 'Sir Rawdon Wells make her a threat one time; she told eet to me, for I been wiz her long time. She give me much confidence. Sir Rawdon say he will keel her if she marry somebody not him.'

'What, you tell me Sir Rawdon threatened to murder the lady, yet she accepts his invitation to spend her honeymoon in his house?' blustered Anson.

'Yes, Monsieur, I tell you zat,' persisted Josephine, 'because it ees ze trute. Mademoiselle, she ees too trusting. She tink no man can do harm to her. She do not believe. At ze first, she ees frightened—a lectle; Sir Rawdon ees so fierce. But next day she laugh, and say it ees only a joke. All ze same, she forbid me to repeat what he say, to Monsieur le Capitaine. She is afraid if I do he will not let her come to stay in zis 'ouse. And she wish to come. She wish eet very much. She is in love wiz zis 'ouse. She would almost 'ave marry

Sir Rawdon for eet, if she had not meet ze Capi-taine.'

' You did not want her to come here ? '

' Oh no, Monsieur ! I beg 'er not. But she say, " Stuff and nonsense ! " '

' You tell me you travelled down before the Cap-tain and his bride. Had you any idea that Sir Rawdon was at the Court ? '

' I 'ave ze idea, yes, because I am sure he vill come. But I know nossing. I dress Madame for dinner. She is 'appy and gay. She 'as no fear. She forgets w'at Sir Rawdon has said. Zis ees all I can tell you, Monsieur.'

The constable at the door who ushered Josephine out, had a word for his superior.

' The young lady, sir, Miss Haste, wants to know if you ain't going to question her ? '

' I hadn't thought of doing so,' said Anson. ' She's so young—a child. They say she only turned up here while the Hastes were dining, or about that time. She can't have any information.'

' She thinks she has, sir. She wishes to speak with you ; says it's important.'

' Oh, very well,' agreed the sergeant. ' Show the young lady in.'

PANDORA HASTE came into the room. Police-Sergeant Anson wondered why he had thought of her as a child. His first impression of the young creature with the mop of bobbed hair and big gipsy eyes was of a girl no more than fifteen at most. Now it was a woman who stood before him, a pale and tragically beautiful woman.

The man felt suddenly embarrassed, and did not know how to address her.

‘I think you said, miss, you had some statement of importance to make,’ he mumbled. ‘I suppose it’s about this sad business. If you happen to know anything that can help——’

‘I know everything,’ Pan broke in. ‘I wish you had called me first. I could have saved you a great deal of trouble and—and the others much pain.’

‘I thought to spare you, miss,’ Anson excused himself. ‘You are so young.’

‘I’m grown up,’ the girl said. ‘I’m a woman—a very unhappy one. Have you never heard any-

thing about me to make you suspect I might be connected with—in whatever has happened to Mrs. Haste ? ’

‘ No, miss, I haven’t,’ replied Anson, not stopping to realize the incongruity of her questioning him. ‘ All I know about you is, that you’re the younger sister of Captain Haste——’

‘ Adopted sister,’ Pan corrected him. ‘ That’s more than being a sister. I owe him everything. It was he who adopted me, not his father. He was a little boy when I was left at the door ; I, a tiny baby. If it hadn’t been for him I should have been sent to some foundling home. By now, I might have been a servant. But he begged to keep me. He gave all his pocket money for my expenses. That was the bargain with his father, to test his character. It’s Kennedy Haste who has educated me, and given me a lovely home and all the pretty things I ever wanted. Not many real brothers would have made the sacrifices he has. Is it any wonder I adore him—that I was absolutely wild with rage to see him falling under the spell of a girl like Evelyn Carroll ? ’

‘ Do you mean, miss,’ asked Anson uncomfortably, notebook in hand, ‘ that you—er—were jealous of Miss Carroll ? ’

‘ Yes, I was, frightfully jealous,’ flashed out Pan. ‘ I didn’t know what jealousy could be, till I saw Ken—Captain Haste, infatuated with a girl

of her sort. I must have a terrible nature, I suppose. I wouldn't have stopped at anything—at anything, I tell you—to separate them!’

The police sergeant from Ardry-le-Mare stared aghast at the girl. What revelation was she going to make? He had flattered himself that he knew fairly well what women, young and old, were capable of in their different types. Yet, if this gipsy child were about to confess a crime, all his convictions would be shaken.

‘Well, but you didn't separate them,’ he said soothingly. ‘They were married to-day.’

‘I did everything I could to prevent them from being married,’ Pan assured him. ‘I wrote anonymous letters——’

‘What—you did? You don't look like a young lady who would do such a thing as that.’

‘I don't know what I look like, and I don't care!’ the girl cried. ‘They were married in spite of me. But I just couldn't stand it. I begged Ken to let me come and stay here. He wouldn't. Still, I didn't give up my plan in spite of that. I took a taxi and drove down alone.’

‘What was your plan?’ Anson questioned her in a kind of fearful fascination. He seemed to be dreaming this scene—dreaming that a charming young girl had turned into a demon before his astonished eyes.

‘My plan was to part Evelyn Carroll and my brother.’

‘How could a girl like you part them?’ the sergeant inquired, still half unconsciously humouring Miss Haste as if she had been a precociously naughty child. Then, suddenly it struck him that he was leading her upon a wrong track. Child or demon, he had no right to do that! ‘But,’ he added hastily, before she could speak, ‘it’s my duty to warn you not to say anything which can be used in evidence against you later. You see, I’m keeping notes in my book here of all the information I get in this case, and if you——’

‘I want what I say to be used against me,’ the strange girl broke in. ‘That’s why I sent word to you I had a statement to make. I may be bad, but—but I’m not quite bad enough to let my guilt fall on any one’s shoulders except my own.’

‘What guilt are you talking about, miss?’ Anson tried to trap her. He had begun to form a theory now that she was hysterical, as many young girls are, and was accusing herself of some fantastic crime for sheer vanity, and excitement’s sake.

‘I have—I have done away with Evelyn,’ the answer came from white, dry lips. ‘She will not be able to spoil my brother’s life any longer.’

‘Good heavens, miss!’ broke out Anson. ‘You

don't want me to believe you've murdered Mrs. Haste ? '

' I don't care whether you believe it or not, so long as you don't believe it of any innocent person.'

She was glaring at him now like a young fury. Or was it that she had nearly reached the end of her endurance, and was afraid of herself ?

Anson lost his head a little, and roared at her : ' Did you kill your sister-in-law, or did you not—if you want to make your statement ? '

Pandora Haste's defiant young face suddenly took on a look of slyness. ' I have made all the statement I care to make,' she hedged. ' I've told you that no one's guilty except myself. I don't need to go any further, do I ? You warned me yourself just now that everything I said would be used in evidence against me. Whatever has happened to Evelyn Carroll I am responsible for, and nobody else. As to what has happened—why, you police people may find that out for yourselves—if you can ! '

The man felt as if the girl had stuck out one of her little feet for him to stumble over, and sent him blundering up against a blank wall. He had never met any one like her, and had never had such an experience as this. He did not know what to think. But he could not help being relieved by the possibility of saving Sir Rawdon Wells. If this incredible young creature had in fact ' done

away' with Kennedy Haste's wife, the burden of suspicion would soon be lifted from the master of Hidden Hall Court!

'Well, that's up to us, I suppose—finding out what did happen. And we're bound to do it before long,' he boasted. 'But you say you don't want any one else to be wrongly suspected. If you did the thing—whatever it was—how about that blood mark on the floor? I don't mind telling you that Sir Rawdon Wells offered to measure his foot with the print, and it fitted.'

'Oh!' the girl choked a little. 'I—I did that on a first impulse. I was sorry afterwards.'

'What did you do?'

'Took a boot of Sir Rawdon's and—dipped it in some blood, and put it there on the floor. You see, I knew about the secret door. He showed it to me himself one afternoon, though he didn't tell many people about it. He took me down to his laboratory that day, and let me watch one of his experiments. He was trying to make a new anæsthetic. I stole a little sample bottle of the stuff; I thought it might be handy by and by. I don't mind telling you this one thing more: I used some of it to-night. Look at this—and smell at it!' She snatched from a smart little breast pocket in her blouse a handkerchief, and laid it on the desk before the police sergeant.

It was the handkerchief she had picked up from

the floor of the music-room ; Eve's handkerchief, marked with her monogram and scented with her perfume—scented also with something else.

‘ E. R. C.’ Anson read the initials.

‘ Evelyn Rosemary Carroll.’

‘ I must keep this, you know,’ he said.

‘ Of course ! ’

‘ You say you dipped a boot of Sir Rawdon's in some blood ? But blood isn't as easy to get at as water.’

‘ I'm not going to tell you about that,’ Pan answered. ‘ That is one of the things you'll have to find out for yourself.’

‘ But—but do you understand that on the strength of what you have told me, miss, I don't see how I can do anything else except arrest you ? ’

Anson was looking at her in a troubled, dazed way as he spoke, somewhat as if he'd caught a mermaid and must provide quarters for it. He saw her start at the last words, and shiver all over. Then she bit her lip and lifted her chin high—a pretty chin with a childish dimple in it.

‘ Naturally ! ’ she said. ‘ Who breaks—pays. One must expect that. I hope there's a nice clean prison in Ardry-le-Mare ! ’

As a matter of fact Ardry-le-Mare was proud of its ‘ prison,’ which consisted of a certain number of cells attached to the police station. But the thought of shutting up this orchid-girl in one of

them nearly drove Anson out of his wits. She would have to go there to-night. There was no help for it, after what she had said. Or was there none? The wretched man racked his brain for some hint given by past experience.

Groping wildly, he reminded himself that she hadn't confessed to murder, and there was as yet no actual proof that murder had been done. Could the girl be detained in this house until she had to appear before the magistrates to-morrow, instead of being led to the police station like a white lamb calling itself a wolf?

But no. There were the blood-stains in the music-room where Mrs. Haste was known to have been playing the piano just before she disappeared. There was that queer-smelling stuff that overpowered the scent on her own monogrammed handkerchief—stuff which the girl proclaimed to be a new anæsthetic stolen by her from Sir Rawdon's laboratory. And more incriminating still—in connexion with the fact that avowedly Miss Haste knew all about the cellar where the great furnace was—appeared her voluntary confession which concerned Sir Rawson's boot. She had not told yet what she had done with that boot. But a pair had been found partly destroyed in the furnace. And bones—apparently human bones—had been found there also. Oh, the evidence was black! No excuse could be found for letting a

person suspected of such a crime remain practically free for a single night !

‘The girl will have to go,’ he decided, eyeing her gloomily. And then aloud he inquired if she wished to name any one to defend her.

‘Defend me ? I don’t know what you mean,’ she said, looking hunted.

Anson explained. She would have to appear in court before the magistrates to-morrow, at Ardry-le-Mare. She must have a solicitor, unless she wanted to trust her case to the police court lawyer, a man who appeared for accused persons if they could not afford to engage one on their own account.

Pandora’s air of defiance had changed to one of utter fatigue, a kind of physical indifference. ‘It doesn’t matter,’ she said. ‘I don’t know anything about lawyers. But I suppose my brother has one. Perhaps he——’.

‘That would hardly do,’ said the police sergeant, still in the dream of strangeness which compelled him to advise a self-confessed criminal in his charge. ‘You seem to forget that you have made an enemy of your adopted brother. You couldn’t possibly be represented by a man engaged by Captain Haste.’

‘That is true,’ the girl agreed. ‘I had forgotten. Of course, Ken will always hate me now.’ Tears gathered in her big eyes again, and dripped

over her cheeks. She did not seem to know that she was crying. She sat staring into space.

‘Well, I will see what can be done,’ Anson said, trying to steel his heart against the strange child, and forget her youth. ‘I shall have to take you over to Ardry-le-Mare presently. But—it isn’t too late yet. If you’ve gone out of your head, and imagined all this, why now’s the time to tell me.’

‘I haven’t imagined it,’ she answered dully. ‘I’ve nothing more to tell—nothing to take back.’

RAWDON WELLS did not know where to go, in his own house.

He was on parole, but he would be watched. He did not care to be unostentatiously followed to his bedroom (now dust-sheeted for his absence in America) by one of Anson's apologetic constables. The library, where Kennedy Haste still was, with Fanny Gillett dragging him back from merciful oblivion, had become impossible for Wells. It wouldn't do for Haste to wake up and find the man supposed to have injured him mortally, under his eyes.

Rawdon's own 'den' was being used as an inquisitory by Anson. His laboratory had been locked and sealed by the police, and the way to it through the cellar where the furnace was, had been closed. The music-room was closed also. The whole place was unhomelike, unfriendly, even hateful to the master of the house. He wandered about the great hall, like a lost spirit, staring vaguely at pictures of his ancestors and envying them because they had been comfortably dead for

a long time. He wished to be any one rather than himself, and thought of the future as unbearable.

It was in this mood that Anson—leaving the elder of his two subordinates to watch the prisoner—found Wells.

The latter stared, surprised that Anson, on the strength of his police authority, had not sent for him if he were wanted for more questioning. Then he read in the sergeant's face that the man had had a shock.

'Sir Rawdon, there's something I have to say to you, not—er—not in my official capacity,' Anson stammered, for never had he been less sure of his ground. 'I don't know if it's unexpected to you or not, but—Miss Haste has—confessed her guilt in the affair of to-night.'

As he spoke, the man kept his eyes respectfully yet keenly fixed on the face of the other. Would Sir Rawdon be able to convince him in a glance of his own innocence? He wished earnestly that it might be so. But only an expert physiognomist could have formed a theory by Wells' expression.

The blood rushed darkly to his forehead, and it seemed that his eyes dilated. But whether he were horrified, alarmed, angry, or simply amazed Anson could not tell. All he was sure of was, that Wells' emotion—whatever it might be—

was violent and hard to control. It was clear, too, if he were not genuinely surprised, that he wished Anson to believe him so.

‘But—but, of course, that’s absurd,’ he said. ‘Miss Haste is a child. She can’t possibly have kidnapped Mrs. Haste, or——’

‘The young lady hasn’t stated what she has done with Mrs. Haste, sir. But she says she has “done away” with her, out of jealousy, and because she thought her brother would be unhappy with such a wife. After the confession she has made, I’ve no alternative except to arrest Miss Haste, in spite of her youth.’

Sir Rawdon turned as pale as he had been flushed. ‘My God!’ he broke out. ‘You don’t mean you’ll take her away from here to spend the night in a cell?’

‘That’s what I must do, sir. And she’ll be lucky if to-night is the only night she spends there. I stretched a point to come and have a private word with you, to ask what about a lawyer to defend her? You see, she’s made herself the enemy of Captain Haste. He’s on the other side. But you, sir, as you might say, are neutral.’

‘Thank you, Anson,’ Wells said warmly, after an instant’s pause. ‘Miss Haste shall have my solicitor to watch her interests. But do me another favour. Let me see her. Let me have a few words with her.’

The sergeant hesitated painfully. He could hardly bear to deny his hero, and yet, he had to think of duty.

‘I couldn’t let you see the young lady alone, sir, if that’s what you mean,’ he answered.

‘It is what I did mean,’ Rawdon admitted. ‘But I realize your position. I can’t insist, of course. Rather than not see her at all, give me a few moments with her before you and both your men, if necessary!’

‘It’s not, sir,’ said Anson. ‘It will be sufficient if I am in the room. And—as you say—just a few minutes!’

‘I won’t ask more,’ the other promised. His dark face was very grave, even tragic; and Anson would have given much to read his mind and heart.

The two went together to the ‘den,’ and the sergeant signed to the constable on guard to take himself off. At first, Rawdon did not see the girl, but called ‘Pan, where are you?’ Hearing his voice, she sat up on a big sofa, on which she had evidently flung herself down among cushions larger than her slender self.

‘Don!’ she cried, looking at him strangely. Anson wondered whether she were glad or sorry that Sir Rawdon had come to her? She didn’t seem glad, he thought. Her eyes were wild and desperate as those of some hunted creature of the forests. Was she afraid of what her brother’s

friend—the man who had loved Eve Carroll—would say to her ?

She need not have been frightened on that score. There was tenderness and pity, either real or simulated, in his tone as he said, ‘ Why, little girl, what is this dreadful thing I hear ? Why have you accused yourself of what you couldn’t possibly have done ? ’

Pandora Haste did not answer. Perhaps she could not. But she did not turn her eyes from Rawdon Wells’ face. They looked at each other in silence, a long, long look, Rawdon standing in front of the sofa on which she sat.

A startling thought flashed into Anson’s mind. ‘ What if they’re both guilty ? What if she’s been playing catpaw for him, and he wanted to see her so as to find out if she’s likely to give him away ? ’

What were those two pairs of eyes telling each other, that their lips dared not say ? Anson could not throw off the idea that there was some secret understanding between the man and the girl, and that he, foolishly, had been playing into their hands. But if he had made a mistake in letting them come together, there was nothing he could do now without making them suspicious, except watch every glance and gesture—feeling like a cad !

‘ Won’t you speak to me, child ? ’ Rawdon pleaded.

‘There’s nothing to say,’ she answered in a choked voice. ‘Because I—stick to every word of what I’ve told the sergeant. The more they go on searching for proofs, the more they will find against me and no one else. But—but I’m glad you don’t hate me!’

‘Hate you?’ echoed Rawdon. ‘As if I could! Haven’t we been dear pals since you were a baby? You know, Pan, I’d do anything on earth for you.’

‘And I for you, Don,’ the girl almost whispered.

‘I think, sir, if you have business to talk it will be best to begin,’ Anson suggested. ‘The time has just about come when I must—be taking Miss Haste to town.’

At this reminder Pandora got to her feet. She tottered a little, as if she would fall back, and Rawdon caught her, flinging an arm round the slight waist.

‘This is too awful!’ he groaned. ‘I don’t know how to bear it!’

‘Don’t mind so much, Don dear,’ the girl said, leaning against him for a moment. ‘I can bear it! Do you remember how you used to say if I fell down and hurt myself when I was a kid, “It will be all the same a hundred years hence”? Well, that’s what I’m telling myself now.’

‘There’s no use in your trying to make me believe that you’ve done any harm to Eve Carroll. I can’t and won’t!’ Rawdon burst out.

Pan was silent, as she had been before when he had protested that she could not possibly have committed any crime. And in her silence Rawdon recalled Anson's warning. Quickly he explained to her that she should have his solicitor, that everything should be done for her. Soon she would be out of this 'abominable pit of misunderstanding.'

'I wish to heaven I could go through this instead of you!' he groaned at last. 'I am as guilty as you are!'

Pan made no answer. She looked at him with the same strange look she had given when he entered the room, and smiled her smile of a young sphinx.

One of his constables Anson left at Hidden Hall Court that night, and he, with the other, took the girl in their car to the police station at Ardryle-Mare. It was not until after they had gone that Haste recovered full consciousness and recalled all that had happened. Remembering made of him almost a madman. He cursed himself for the time he had wasted. Eve must be found. She couldn't be dead! Such things didn't happen. Somebody was playing a vile trick upon him—the cruellest trick ever played on a man. Why, of course!—it was coming back to him: Rawdon Wells had done the thing!

'No,' Fanny Gillett explained softly, 'not Sir Rawdon, after all. He's not suspected now. I've

heard from my mother everything that's happened since I've been here in the library with you. Some one has confessed.'

'Who? And what has he confessed?' Ken demanded, getting to his feet.

'It isn't "he." It's a woman,' Miss Gillett said with secret pleasure.

'What woman could it be?' Haste questioned blankly. 'There's no one here who—who hated Eve, except——' His eyes lit as he flashed a look of suspicion on her. 'There in Eve's room you were saying——'

'Well, it wasn't I who had to confess, anyhow,' the nurse caught him up. 'It was your adopted sister, Miss Pandora Haste. She must hate your wife a whole lot worse than I do, for she's been taken off to prison for murdering her. You'd have to hear the truth soon. It may as well be now.'

* * * * *

It was all that Pan could do not to scream when the door of her cell was shut. Only pride, and the knowledge that this was but the beginning, prevented her from beating on the door and begging to be let out, if but for a minute. Instead, she sank down on the hard bench which ran along one side of the little room, and tried to think.

'What will become of me? What will they do to me?' she asked herself in a whisper, to have the

human comfort of her own voice. But she could think of no comforting answer, and for hours she sat there, scarcely moving, till the early summer dawn rose like a grey tide.

A faint light filtered into the cell, and as the girl's sad eyes wandered over her dreary quarters, they fell upon a small white pellet, which lay close to her limp hand on the bench. The girl reached wearily out, and touched the thing. It was a tiny ball of paper.

It seemed incredible that it should be meant for her to find, and yet, Pan felt that it had been placed where it was with precisely that object in view.

She picked it up, and opening it carefully out saw a piece of neatly-cut letter-paper, about three inches square. Then she looked closely and discovered that very fine but clear handwriting spread to top and bottom and close to the margins, on one side.

EVEN when she had seen the writing, Pan could hardly believe that the message was for her. It seemed much more likely that it had been meant for her predecessor in the cell, and that, being small, the ball of paper had been overlooked. There was not light enough yet to read the almost microscopic words; but as dawn brightened, Pan's eyes were able slowly to make out the words.

Great pains had been taken evidently to render them clear. They had been written with a peculiarly fine-pointed pen, with very black ink, and each letter was carefully formed, as if in print.

After all, the thing was for her! As soon as she began to read she saw this, and was bewildered by the discovery. Who, that knew what had happened, could have known also that she was to be put into this cell, and have had time to greet her here with a letter? She could think of no answer to that question, yet the letter was in her hand!

‘ You will know this is for you, without a name attached,’ she read. ‘ It is to warn you that you have made a great mistake in claiming to be guilty of Mrs. Haste’s disappearance. Rawdon Wells has murdered her, and the truth is bound to come out. Your sacrifice can do no good, and it will do much harm. You possess proofs of Wells’ guilt. If, instead of asserting your own, you tell what you really know when you are questioned to-morrow, your reward will be great. You shall learn who are your parents and be told the secret of your birth—a secret which would be of immense advantage to you. But keep to your present mad course, and you will never know more about yourself than you know now. Behind the bench on the floor of your cell you will find a pencil and a bit of paper similar to this. Write on it “ Yes ” or “ No,” according to the way you make up your mind, wisely or foolishly. Roll the paper into a ball again, and stuff it into the key-hole. That is all you need do. Others will do the rest. Remember, this is your one and only chance, offered by a—Wellwisher.’

Many mysterious things had happened in the last twenty-four hours, but to Pandora this seemed the most mysterious or, at least, the most unaccountable of all.

She looked under the bench, and there in a corner against the wall was a tiny end of pencil

with a neatly sharpened point, and a little ball of clean, blank paper.

There was no hesitation in the girl's mind as to which of the two words she should write. Yet, if she had not been so passionately decided, the temptation would have been very great. All her life she had longed to know who were her father and mother; whether poverty and accident had guided the person who left her there in a box to the door of the Hastes' house, or if that house had been chosen for a particular reason.

She had seen the clothes she had worn at the time, and the wrappings in the box. They were poor, yet she had dreamed sometimes that in spite of this bit of evidence—in spite of all the rest—that she came of people in Ken and Rawdon's class of life. Once it would have meant a great deal to find out that this was true. But now—now life seemed at an end for her, before it had fully begun. What did it matter who she was—she, the girl who had confessed to a crime?

Still, she was excited and forgot to think of her position in reading this incredible, anonymous letter. How amazing it was that the person who asked her to take back her confession should be one who knew who she really was!

Or, was that part merely a lure? It might be so, for almost every one who knew her, knew she was Kennedy Haste's adopted sister. Any-

body could easily find out as much as that, and then make lying promises!

She wrote the one word 'No' in large letters on the bit of blank paper, when she had well smoothed it out. And on second thoughts she added underneath, 'I don't believe you know anything about me that every one doesn't know.'

Again she crushed the paper into a little round ball, and pushed it into the keyhole, as she had been told to do.

The light was so strong now that she imagined it to be about four o'clock. Even in a prison, Pandora supposed that you were not routed out and made to begin your day much earlier than six o'clock! In that case, it would be a long time before she could expect to be called. If only she could drop asleep for an hour or two! She began to feel so utterly spent that it seemed she would have difficulty in getting through the day unless she had a little rest.

So far, she had not even tried to sleep. But now she lay down on the bench, which was also the bed, or bunk, her head on a wooden support that perhaps called itself a pillow, covered with a coarse blanket. 'I believe—I'm going to sleep!' she told herself, as a cool cloud seemed to sweep over her, beginning to blot out remembrance. 'How wonderful to forget—if only for a little while!'

It was the last she knew.

* * * * *

Police-Sergeant Anson was dressing in his small, semi-detached house close to the police station, when the knocker banged furiously on his green-painted front door. His wife's toilet was not so far advanced as his own, for it was even earlier than he usually rose, and he was obliged to answer the knock himself.

The constable who had motored back with him last night stood on the doorstep, and Anson knew instantly that he was to hear bad news of some sort, though he could not guess what it might be.

'Miss Haste's cell is empty, sergeant!' the words were flung brusquely at his head.

'Empty!' Anson gasped.

'Yessir; and the door locked on the outside. She can't possibly have let herself out, and there's nobody in the place would do it. But there it is! She's gone.'

Anson finished dressing in less than three minutes, hardly heard his pretty young wife asking 'What about breakfast, Bill?' and buckled on his belt in the front yard.

As the constable had said: 'There it was!' The girl was undoubtedly gone, and the cell was undoubtedly locked on the outside.

Ardry-le-Mare, being proud of its modern and

up-to-date cells, had thought it necessary to provide a wardress for the benefit of the rare female prisoners gathered into the police fold; and it had been the duty of this woman to open the cell where Pandora Haste had passed the night. She had done so, taking food, and had found no one there. Although she had seen and searched the prisoner at the time of the girl's arrival, something after midnight, and knew positively that 5 was the cell's number, she thought that, after all, she must somehow have been mistaken. The list of names with the numbers of cells told her, however, that there was no question of a mistake. The girl had been spirited away as mysteriously as though she had gone through the keyhole.

This was a grave affair for Sergeant Anson. He was responsible for the prisoners, and it seemed to him that his well-known regard for the family at Hidden Hall Court might lay him open to suspicion. Still, even if he had wished to connive at Miss Haste's escape, he could not have got her out unseen, for there were but two entrances and exits from the police station. One was by passing through the 'charge room.' The other was through a corridor which ran behind the charge room and in front of the row of six cells. At the end of this passage was a door, stoutly fastened and always guarded.

Now, here was still another mystery for the

Scotland Yard detective to unravel when he came.

How had Pandora Haste escaped from a locked cell, without breaking the door or wall, or leaving any other sign of violence—in fact, without leaving any traces of her late presence?

Not only the police station and its neighbourhood, but the whole town and its outskirts were searched as thoroughly as possible by the small force Anson could command. Workers in the field, and men in all sorts of vehicles along the road were questioned. The railway station was visited. Nothing was left undone, and nothing was found out. In whatever way the girl had managed to disappear, she must, Anson thought, have made her ‘get away’ while it was still dark.

Last night—for Sir Rawdon’s sake—he had secretly dreaded the arrival of the London detective. Now, however, he was impatient for it. He began to believe in the guilt of the girl, young as she was; for if she were sharp enough to escape from a locked cell where collusion seemed impossible, she was sharp enough to rid herself of a hated woman—yes, to do it in any one of a dozen queer ways! It seemed to the sergeant that at all events this cloud hanging over the police station had a silver lining: Pandora Haste’s flight to avoid appearing before the magistrates was likely to place Sir Rawdon Wells beyond the range of suspicion.

At half-past eight precisely a gipsy-faced youth whose clothes (and even his noticeably thick black eyelashes) were covered with dust, stopped his motor-cycle in front of the police station. On his own request he was taken at once to Anson, who stared incredulously, almost stupidly, as he announced himself: Detective V. Dagon, from Scotland Yard.

The provincial policeman's face showed his mind so plainly that the dark youth grinned: 'They always take me for my own understudy at first,' he said. 'But I'm not so young as I look, you'll be glad to hear.'

And, of course, he couldn't be, when one came to think of his record. Nobody in England had heard of him before the war. Then he had come over with the first Canadian contingent; and when he began to be talked about by those 'in the know,' it leaked out that he had been a boy prodigy in the detective world of Canada. Also, he had served with Pinkerton, and had brought off a wonderful coup which only a youth could have accomplished. In France, he had been ostensibly a dispatch-rider, motor-cycling being his particular craze since boyhood. But that was camouflage. The young fellow who could not have been more than nineteen when he joined up, had done some glorified 'spy work,' only possible for a linguist of unusual gifts. About the detective's Canadian

antecedents, Anson knew no more than he had been told through the telephone last night in answer to a question addressed to a friend at the Yard. Dagon was said to be a name coined by the young man out of the sobriquet 'Dago,' which had been applied to him as a child. Why he had been dubbed 'Dago,' no one knew, unless it might be that he was dark enough for an Italian, and spoke that tongue among others. Since the war he had remained in England, and his services had been accepted by Scotland Yard.

'I often find my youth and innocence rather an asset,' the Canadian went on, showing the white teeth that made his war-tanned skin almost copper brown in contrast. 'Who knows but it will help me to make good in this case? I have a sort of "hunch" it will! That's partly why I asked for this job. And one other reason is that the family at Hidden Hall Court has had Italian blood in several generations. I'm always interested in Italians, for I'm supposed to be Italian myself. But that's enough about me! I suppose you'll want to take me right over to Hidden Hall Court, which my road map tells me isn't far away. Or do you want to talk things over first?'

'I think we'd best talk things over first,' said Anson, 'here on the spot. For we have had a mysterious occurrence this morning, which is closely connected with the case.' Whereupon

he explained to the man—or boy—from Scotland Yard, what had happened in Cell 5.

‘That girl has done an impossible thing,’ he finished, as he opened the door of the locked cubicle. ‘I must say I take off my hat to her!’

‘I always do that gladly to a lady, especially if she’s young and pretty,’ agreed Dagon. ‘But—I don’t take it off to this one on the grounds that she’s done an impossible thing. She hasn’t. She hasn’t done anything.’

‘Beg pardon. I don’t quite catch your meaning,’ stammered Anson.

‘It has all been done for her,’ said the other, sniffing daintily. ‘Don’t you smell it? An anæsthetic has been used here.’

ANSON had not a keen sense of smell ; neither was it defective. He considered himself normal in that regard, and he had smelled nothing at all in Cell Number 5. Neither had his colleagues, he believed. If they had, they would of course have mentioned it, especially the wardress, who was a temperamental, sensitive Welshwoman married to a man of Ardry-le-Mare—in fact, to a constable.

Having been told of it, however, and put upon his mettle, Anson's experimental sniffs served him a better turn.

'Since you speak of it, I believe there is a queer smell,' he agreed, 'though it's very faint.'

'It is now. From what you say, hours—we don't yet know how many—have passed since the girl was taken away. I'm certain it's the odour of an anæsthetic, though it's not common or garden chloroform or ether. Must be one of those newly-invented things that chemists are always fussing at.'

Instantly Pandora Haste's words of last night

flashed back into Anson's brain. She had spoken of a new anæsthetic invented by Sir Rawdon Wells. She had stolen—so she said—a 'sample bottle,' and she defiantly asserted that the odour mingling with the perfume on a certain handkerchief was the characteristic odour of Wells' anæsthetic.

Anson knew that the 'sample bottle' had not been found on the girl. The wardress, Mrs. Jones, who had searched her last night, had shown him everything taken from Miss Haste. There had been a purse, with nearly twelve pounds in it, a locket containing two miniature photographs—one of Captain Kennedy Haste, and one of Sir Rawdon Wells; a wrist watch with 'To Pan from Don' inscribed inside; also a pearl ring and a quaint brooch. The brooch was a profile representation in gold of an open box, from which a winged figure of Hope, with jewelled wings, was looking out. On the back of this was engraved 'Pandora's Box. May Hope never fly away.'

As the sergeant duly displayed these objects to Dagon (having already shown the monogrammed handkerchief, still holding its odour), he noticed that the Canadian examined the trinkets with more interest than they seemed to deserve.

'I suppose you don't make anything special out of them, do you?' he asked almost jealously. Not that he was jealous. But if this 'kid detec-

tive' could deduce valuable evidence from these trifles, he could bring water from a stone, it would seem, and was worthy to be envied by the mere average man.

'No, I don't make anything special out of the things themselves,' said Dagon, slowly, with an odd, introspective look in his big, dark eyes. 'But there's something queer about me. You may think I'm a fool. Several people have thought so. But I believe most of them have changed their minds. I have—or I imagine I have (maybe it's much the same thing in the end)—the faculty of calling up before my mind's eye the appearance of a person owning any object I hold in my hands. That comes maybe from trying to cultivate and wake my pineal gland! Probably you've never heard of it—but if it interests you look it up in the encyclopædia later! Now, nobody has ever told me what this girl Pandora Haste is like, but listen while I describe what I seem to see, and tell me if the description fits. Small, slim figure; hair, dark-brown with red lights; big eyes, black—no, yellow-brown; very thick lashes and straight black brows. Pert nose; pretty, smiling red mouth; determined chin; dimple. What about it?'

'By George, you must have seen a photograph!' broke out Anson.

'I swear I haven't. And if I had, I shouldn't

have seen the colouring. I've described the image that comes up before me, that's all. Evidently I've hit it.'

'You must be what they call a clairvoyant,' said Anson, uncomfortably.

'I don't know what I am. I know only what I can do,' returned the other.

'I've heard of those crystal-gazers in London,' Anson went on. 'They look in a glass ball and see what happens somewhere else. You're like that, only you don't need to have the crystal.'

'Unfortunately I can't see what happens,' amended Dagon. 'I see—just an image—when I hold a person's things in my hand. Then it goes away. Already that picture of Miss Haste is going. But I shan't forget it. I wish to goodness I could see what happens. In that case we'd know who kidnapped her, and where she is now.'

'You think she was kidnapped?' Anson asked doubtfully.

'Well, she couldn't anæsthetize herself!'

'No—o, I suppose not.'

'One would think, to hear you, that you thought she could do almost anything—like a young witch.'

Anson laughed uneasily. 'Well, Mr. Dagon, if it was the sixteenth or seventeenth century

instead of the twentieth that's just about what I'd think this—this girl was: a "young witch"!?

'Gee! I'm beginning to be mighty interested in her!' exclaimed the Canadian. 'I'd like to get hold of her photo, and see how much like the "brain image" she really is. As Miss Haste is friend enough of Sir Rawdon Wells to take a present of a watch from him, she's probably given him a portrait of herself in a silver frame, and I shall come across it over at the Court.'

'Yes, that's just what you will come across in a room called "Sir Rawdon's den,"' Anson said; 'a portrait in a silver frame. It stands on his desk; and on the opposite side——' he bit back the words and coughed instead, pretending to have 'swallowed the wrong way.' Of course, he wanted to help the London detective all he could, and it was his business to do so. But he didn't feel like adding another straw to the burden of suspicion against Sir Rawdon Wells. The silver lining of that cloud had turned leaden again, with Dagon's pronouncement. This new anæsthetic of Sir Rawdon's on Mrs. Haste's handkerchief had precisely the same odour as that which Dagon detected in Cell 5. No need for him to express his opinion that a blank place on Sir Rawdon's desk had probably been adorned

until lately by a framed picture of Evelyn Carroll!

It was difficult, however, to put that Canadian off a scent.

'Yes,' said Dagon, with the dreamy air which seemed now and then to descend suddenly upon him. 'Yes, no doubt Miss Haste's silver frame was flanked on the other side of the desk by a better and bigger one of the beautiful Miss Carroll—until she threw over Sir Rawdon for his friend.'

'So you know all about that already, do you?' grunted Anson. 'Well, I must say, Scotland Yard doesn't seem to let much grass grow under its men's feet. I didn't call the Yard up on the 'phone from the Court last night till a fairly late hour, and you must have started off on your motor-bike at a fairly early one, Mr. Dagon. Yet you're up in the details of that little scandal which we folks in Ardry-le-Mare thought was only neighbourhood gossip.'

'I mustn't take too much credit for the Yard or myself,' said Dagon. 'I'm afraid I didn't get "up" in those details between last night and this morning. I knew 'em beforehand. Perhaps you've heard that I was with Pinkerton for awhile. I might have been there to this day, as I was doing pretty well, if it hadn't been for the war. I was a kid; but I had some luck, and was put on one

or two big jobs under Pinkerton. One of them was to find a string of pearls that belonged to Miss Carroll's aunt—the "Aunt Jean" who's been chaperoning her in England since the war broke out—Mrs. Payntor.'

'Oh, then you met Miss Carroll!' exclaimed Anson, interested.

Dagon laughed. 'I didn't exactly "meet" her,' he said, 'except in the front hall of her aunt's house sometimes. I was acting as Mrs. Payntor's footman, while I watched for the pearl thief. It took me several weeks to polish off the job—yes, I did polish it off!—and I had plenty of time to fall in love with the fair Evelyn. She was my first love, so far as I can remember. I've had three since, one French girl, one Belgian, and one English V.A.D. Now I'm about ready for the fourth! But I've never forgotten Miss Carroll, and the pleasure of a really hopeless passion. I can jolly well sympathize with Sir Rawdon Wells, I tell you! Naturally I've sort of kept an eye on Miss Carroll's affairs over here on this side, since I was demobbed, and took up my old job as a "'tec.'"

'Then that was the real reason you wanted this particular job!' Anson blurted out before he stopped to think. But Dagon only laughed.

'Well, that counted for something,' he confessed. 'Still, I told you no lie. I always do go for any-

thing that's got a scrap of Italy in it! Makes me feel at home—though if I am Italian, as I may be, I haven't seen my part of the map since I was three or four, at which age I seem to have turned up in Canada, personally conducting my own tour! If I do say it myself, looking at it all round, I don't think they could have got a man who'll take a keener interest than I shall in this case. And now we'd better be getting over to the scene of action, what?'

Anson agreed; but could not resist a question. 'I suppose you haven't formed any theory yet from what you've seen and heard here, as to the disappearance of the young lady from her cell?'

'I've formed several,' returned Dagon, promptly, 'each one of which differs completely from the other. I shall let them all sleep and get their much-needed rest, until I've looked into things at the Court.'

Sir Rawdon Wells, who had given his word not to leave the house, had slept in his own bedroom—or, at least, occupied it. But Haste was up and out at early dawn, wildly searching for some trace of Eve. He worshipped her so utterly, it seemed as if his love must be like a beacon, to show him the way by which she had gone. For he would not believe that she was dead!

It had been a hideous shock to hear that Pan

—his little petted ‘toy-sister,’ Pan—had declared herself guilty of ‘doing away’ with Eve—whatever that might mean. He would not—he protested to Fanny Gillett and the constable left at the Hall—believe for an instant that the girl had told the truth. She was either ‘out of her head,’ or else she was trying to protect some suspected person, probably Rawdon Wells. It was monstrous, he said, that the child should have been taken to prison—to pass a night in a common cell. If he hadn’t been fainting like a schoolgirl himself, he would never have permitted it. Somehow, he would have prevented such an inhuman outrage. As it was, he must wait till morning to rescue his sister.

When morning came, however, Ken was in a different state of mind. His brain had cleared, and he had remembered the mystery of Pan’s sudden appearance in the house; how she had come although she’d been forbidden to do so, and showed herself suddenly to him in the dining-room after Eve had left him there. How she had refused to tell her reason for disobeying him, and had said only that it was very important. She had had a dream. She felt obliged to come! And he had tried furiously to remember whether Eve had ceased to sing before he saw the unexpected vision of Pan. If only he could recall that one detail, it would make all—or nearly all

—the difference. But at the time, there had been no motive for impressing this fact upon his mind.

Just because it was not impressed there, when morning dawned Ken felt that he could not go to Ardry-le-Mare and beg for a word with Pan—or permission to send her a message. He believed in her still, of course. But—he just couldn't!

As for seeing Rawdon Wells, that was also impossible for Kennedy Haste to do of his own free will. If Pan were guilty, Rawdon was innocent. And he might be innocent in any case. But when Ken learned from Fanny Gillett that Sir Rawdon was in the house still, by request of the police, he longed fiercely to be out of it himself. Nevertheless, it was as necessary for him to be there, as for Wells. He had not pledged himself to remain. But it was the last place where he had seen Eve—the place where she might still be, hidden in some secret room to which, perhaps, she had been lured. He had thought of a man in London, a famous architect who was a great expert on secret hiding-places in old houses, and had written a scientific sort of book about them. Ken determined to 'phone Sir Edgar Larned to come down at once—with or without the advice of the police. As it happened, he had just called the architect up and got an answer when Mr. Dagon

from Scotland Yard, with Police-Sergeant Anson, were announced.

‘Let them come in!’ he said.

The two men entered and, at sight of the detective, Haste uttered a sharp exclamation.

‘GOOD heavens! Who are you?’ Ken flung at the new-comer.

Dagon, who had stepped briskly into the room paused, and Anson immediately introduced him. By the time this short ceremony was over, Haste had controlled himself.

‘I am very jumpy,’ he apologized, yet he continued to stare at the young man from Scotland Yard, as if fascinated. ‘Let’s get to business as quick as we can,’ he added, evidently wishing to change the subject. But Dagon delayed: ‘That’s what I am here for,’ he said. ‘Still, I should very much like to ask, when you inquired who I was just now, for whom you took me?’

‘Oh, I took you for no one in particular,’ Haste returned. ‘I was surprised—preoccupied—I hardly knew what I said.’

‘I understand. That’s quite natural.’ Dagon accepted the explanation with no further questioning; but his words, ‘I understand,’ held more than one meaning. It was clear to Anson that the detective believed Captain Haste had taken him for

‘some one in particular,’ and that he was wondering who that some one was, or trying quietly to deduce the truth from evidence beyond the sergeant’s mental sight. The incident brought back to Anson an impression of his own, at first glimpse of the boyish-looking motor-cyclist. It had been a fleeting one, because surprise at the detective’s youth had soon pushed it out of his head. But he remembered now saying to himself, ‘This fellow is the image of some one I’ve seen. Who is it?’

Anson stared hard at Dagon, as he recalled this first impression of his own. He wondered if Captain Haste’s thought had been the same, and if so, why the dickens he objected to admitting it? Yet for his life the sergeant could not get that first impression back. In losing it, he lost the chance of recalling the illusion face which resembled Dagon’s.

Haste was willing to be catechized. He told the detective how anxious Miss Carroll—as she then was—had been to accept Sir Rawdon Wells’ pressing invitation to pass the honeymoon at Hidden Hall Court. She had, he said, admired the place immensely, and had seemed very curious to know if it hid secrets, as the name suggested. As for him, he would have preferred to go abroad. Not that he had any real suspicion of Wells’ motive in lending the house. But, as many people knew the story, there was no harm in mentioning that Sir

Rawdon Wells had proposed to Miss Carroll and had been refused. That was all. There'd never been a definite engagement between them ; but in the circumstances Captain Haste wasn't happy in accepting his friend's generosity.

' I was telling her last night, just before she got up from the dinner table and went into the music room,' Ken said, ' about an elder branch of the family here having the name of " Hidden." There's no trace left of them except the name given to this house, I believe. If they hadn't died out, Rawdon Wells' ancestors would not have inherited the Court. I was cocksure then, in talking to my wife, that there was nothing esoteric about the word " Hidden " in connexion with the house, though I granted that there might be secret nooks. Since she disappeared, however, I've been asking myself if I were not mistaken—if there may not have been some play on the name, to cover a concealed room—" Hidden Hall Court." For anyone not knowing that a family called Hidden had built the oldest part of the house, the idea of a " hidden hall " would be obvious. I can't help wondering if my wife has been lured into a secret room somewhere under this roof, and if she's being kept there.'

' It's possible,' Dagon admitted ; though he and Anson were both thinking of the blood-marks, and the bones—supposed to be human—found in the

furnace ; to say nothing of the half-burned boots and the bit of pink satin. ' But even if so,' the detective went on, ' the name " Hidden Hall " might have had reference to the cellar where Sir Rawdon's laboratory is. The sergeant was describing it——'

' No,' Haste broke in. ' It couldn't be so, for that cellar isn't secret at all. Neither is the room Wells has turned into a laboratory. The only part that's secret there, is the staircase leading down from the tapestry boudoir. The other way down isn't " hidden." '

' Well, no doubt you'll talk over your theory with the architect you've 'phoned to come down here,' said Dagon. ' He will probably be able to find out if there's anything in it. Meanwhile if you'll permit me, I'll have a look at the rooms most concerned : the dining-room, the music-room, the tapestry boudoir, and, of course, the laboratory and cellar, all of which I understand from Sergeant Anson have been closed by his order. By the way, is this the room Sir Rawdon Wells calls his den ? '

' No,' said Haste, ' this is the library. I'm here now because of the telephone. The " den " is next door.'

' May I go into the den for a moment, alone ? ' Dagon asked.

Haste looked surprised, but consented at once. Anson took the detective to the door of the next

room, and then returned, guessing that Captain Haste would wish to ask questions about his adopted sister.

By Dagon's suggestion, he had not yet mentioned the new addition to last night's mystery : Pandora Haste's disappearance from a locked cell. Dagon had thought that the issues might be somewhat confused if this news was sprung suddenly upon Captain Haste, and preferred that all the necessary questions to be put by him should be answered before the blow fell. In Dagon's absence, therefore, the sergeant told as tactfully as he could what had happened at Ardry-le-Mare.

The man from Scotland Yard had no sooner shut the door of the ' den ' than he walked to the desk. There was just one photograph displayed upon it, a large one in a silver frame. It represented a girl with thick, bobbed hair, and big eyes that looked straight out of the picture into the eyes of anyone who gave back the look. Dagon gave it back, as he took up the frame and held it for a long time in his hand. While he so held it, he had the air of a man in a dream, and his eyes were fixed on the pictured face as if he were magnetized. Yet no one had ever called Pandora Haste a great beauty.

In the short khaki dress of some sort of war-worker, which she wore in the photograph, the girl was rather like a charming boy, a very young boy, not more than fifteen.

‘ Well ! So that’s the girl ! ’ he said to himself, half aloud. ‘ If she needs any saving, I’m on the job to save her, for all I’m worth.’

He determined to find out what he could about Pandora Haste. So far, he knew only what Anson had hastily told him : that she was an adopted sister of Captain Haste, and had confessed to being ‘ frightfully jealous ’ of her sister-in-law, the vanished bride. But there must be a lot more to learn about her past and present.

Dagon looked at nothing else in the ‘ den.’ He had gone there solely to see the photograph of Pandora Haste, and he had wished to be alone, with no curious eyes upon him, while he gazed at it as long as he liked. The room held no other interest for him ; and after five minutes’ lingering he returned to Haste and Anson.

All the interviewing of members of the household had to be gone through over again : the picturesque old butler, the housekeeper Mrs. Gillett, and her V.A.D. daughter, Josephine, Eve Carroll’s maid, and several servants of the Court, including Tate, the chauffeur. This duty Dagon performed, before seeing Sir Rawdon, although to Anson’s idea the programme should have been carried out the other way round. ‘ I don’t want to form an opinion of Sir Rawdon till I’m primed ready to combat it if necessary,’ he explained. ‘ You know I’m inclined to like people with Italian blood in their veins. I

don't care to begin by liking him, though I may end by doing it.'

Even the blood-marks in the music-room he saw before asking for an interview with the master of the house—who was also its prisoner. And these marks interested him immensely.

The footprint was clear, and beside it stood the boot which Rawdon Wells had directed Anson to **fit** into the reddish outlines. 'Very strange it should be so clear, and yet the only track that exists,' the detective thought. 'There isn't another trace of blood on the floor—not one!'

Then the queer thought jumped into his head: 'Looks as if there hadn't been any blood to waste, and what there was had to be used to make the best possible show.'

Dagon kept these ideas to himself for the time, however, without a word to Anson who was at his side, waiting to press the spring which raised the tapestry. 'This is where the secret door I told you about is hidden,' the sergeant explained, 'and here are the finger-prints that you—but, by all that's holy, what's happened to them?'

He had caused the tapestry to lift in its awning-form over the hidden door, and was about to point out the mark of the hand, palm and fingers, which had been so distinct last night. But, to his intense astonishment, all that remained of the prints was a red smudge.

‘Why—why,’ Anson stammered. ‘I don’t understand this.’

‘You told me there were four definite finger-marks and a thumb, with the outer cushion of the palm,’ Dagon reminded him.

‘So there were! And everything was locked here before we left last night; also the way up from the cellar was fastened, so the spring wouldn’t work. No one could have got in. You’d think it was the ghosts!’

‘Was this room left unguarded at all after the marks were discovered, and before you went away for the night?’ Dagon inquired.

Anson tried to think back. ‘Not that I can remember,’ he said, miserably. ‘This is a misfortune. Yet I don’t see where I’ve been to blame for carelessness, honestly, Mr. Dagon.’

‘I don’t say you have,’ the Canadian soothed him. ‘But five seconds would have been time enough for this work with some one who knew just where the marks were, and what she wanted to do to them.’

‘She?’

‘Well, that’s the supposition that presents itself, doesn’t it, if that girl was determined to shield someone else at no matter what cost to herself?’

Anson stared at Dagon. ‘So that’s the way you judge Miss Haste’s character—and her confession?’ he asked.

‘Anyhow, that’s one way of judging them. So far, it looks at least as good as any other. Did Miss Haste go down to the laboratory with you, by this secret way, and burst in upon Sir Rawdon? I forget if you told me about that.’

‘No, she didn’t follow us down. We didn’t let any of the women come,’ Anson said.

‘Then, while you were in the cellar she could have got a chance to spoil the marks.’

‘She might, though there were several people about. And she’d risk incriminating herself by leaving her own marks in smudging the others out before the blood had dried.’

‘She seemed last night to want to do that.’

‘Incriminate herself? Well, yes, she did seem so.’

‘And to save Sir Rawdon?’

‘Yes—that, too.’

‘I must try and get some finger-prints of Miss Haste’s in the cell,’ said Dagon. ‘There are sure to be plenty on the bench where she sat and lay down to sleep. If I take prints here and they match with those, we shall be able to deduce that they’re hers, all right. But as for the prints which have been purposely obliterated by Miss Haste, or by someone unknown—they are almost certainly useless. Look with what care they’ve been wiped out of existence, just leaving a blur of red.’

The two men bent their heads closer over the

marks on the wall, Dagon using a pocket electric torch under the deep shadow of the tapestry. But suddenly the Canadian stuck his head out from under the raised awning. His sense of hearing was almost animal in its quickness, and he thought that he had caught the sound of a light step.

‘What do you want here?’ he asked sharply, and was answered by a slight, nervous cough.

Then there was some one!

Anson looked out too.

The butler, Marianti, had come into the room.

‘I beg pardon, sares,’ he said courteously, ‘I ’ope you will both forgive ze liberty zat I ’ave follow you ’ere. But I do not find ze chance to speak wiz you alone in some ozzet place. I do no ’arm in zis room, I ’ope?’

‘No, you do no harm,’ Dagon replied. ‘Only you rather startled us for a moment, you came so quietly. Was there something you wanted to ask me?’

‘Somet’ing I want to tell you, sares,’ the Italian amended. ‘Somet’ing w’ich I fear is very terrible.’

‘**Y**OU have discovered something more—something which we didn’t discover last night?’ exclaimed Anson.

‘Yes, sare. But it was not your fault you not discover it zen, because it do not exist las’ night.’

‘Out with it!’ the sergeant encouraged the old man.

‘Yes, sare, I am going to out wiz it,’ Marianti said meekly. ‘Zis morning arrive a letter from London which is registare and express, for Sare Rawdon. I recognize ze ’andwriting on ze envelope. It is ze ’and of Signor Magnani, ze cousin of Sare Rawdon, ’oo employ me one time, and recommend me ’ere, w’en ze last butler Davis has been suddenly ill a short time ago. It is me ’oo receive ze letters and divide zem out. W’en I see zis envelope, I say to myself, “I will take it wiz my own ’and to Sare Rawdon.” I go to ’is bedroom. I knock. I tink I ’ear ’im call “Come in!” I open ze door. Zere is nobody in ze room! I

would go to look for Sare Rawdon some ozzar place, but I smell a strong smell of fire. I tink Sare Rawdon must 'ave left a pipe or a cigarette w'ich 'as commenced to burn some table-cloth or maybe ze beautiful rug of Persia on ze floor. I search, and I find much smoke come from ze grate, be'ind a big screen w'ich 'ides it unless one look on purpose. Zis I tink strange! In summer we do not 'ave ze fire in ze grates. I poke wiz a poker at a mass of w'ite stuff, and I find two towels, much covered wiz brownish red stain w'ich I tink is blood.'

The police-sergeant and the detective glanced at each other, but it was Anson who spoke. 'Well, what then? Have you spoken to Sir Rawdon about what you found?'

'No, sare—not yet,' replied Marianti. 'I do not know w'ere Sare Rawdon is. Besides, I do not like to tell 'im myself. Sare Rawdon might not understand zat I do not, of course, tink it is 'im 'oo put zese tings in ze grate. No. It must be a person 'oo 'ates Sare Rawdon, and wish to do 'im 'arm. I say to myself, "Zare is a plot." And I run quick out of ze room to speak wiz ze constable of police zat was in ze 'ouse all night. Zen a servant informs me ze illustrious signore 'ave arrive, and I come 'ere instead.'

'Oh, this affair in the bedroom happened only a few minutes ago, then?' said Anson.

‘Not ten minutes ago, sare. Would it please you to visit ze room of Sare Rawdon, both gentlemen, for yourselves. I do not tink ’e ’as return yet.’

‘Where is he—do you know?’ Dagon asked with apparent carelessness.

‘On ze east terrace, sare.’

‘Could you see him there, from one of the windows of his room when you were there just now?’

Marianti looked surprised at this question, and as if he were not quite sure how to take it—whether or no to be hurt.

‘I might ’ave seen ’im, perhaps, sare, if I ’ad looked out for ’im,’ the old man admitted. ‘But I did not tink to do zat. A servant ’ave told me Sare Rawdon was below on ze terrace.’

‘Well, I suppose we’d better go up at once with the butler and take a squint at what’s in that grate?’ Anson suggested, his face troubled. He was depressed at the prospect of more evidence against Wells, and judging from appearances, a very bad piece of evidence indeed.

‘You go with him,’ said the Canadian. ‘If you don’t mind, I’ll have a look round for Sir Rawdon and introduce myself.’

‘Certainly, do as you prefer, Mr. Dagon,’ the sergeant responded. He was astonished at the

decision, however, for the news brought by the butler seemed to him as important as it certainly was unpleasant. Anson didn't know whether to be flattered that the Scotland Yard man should trust such a matter entirely to him, or to wonder whether the detective regarded it lightly. Surely, that couldn't be, however. It was important—it must be so from any point of view.

The butler also had the air of being taken aback by Dagon's indifference. Perhaps Marianti feared that his ideas about a 'plot' of which Rawdon Wells had been made the victim, were laughed at by the London man. Anyhow, there it was. Dagon would not go to Sir Rawdon's bedroom. He was set on meeting Sir Rawdon himself—at last.

The detective took himself to the east terrace, and there saw a man (whom he supposed to be Sir Rawdon) seated on the stone balustrade, reading a letter. Dagon paused at a distance and studied the picture for a moment, the word 'picture' distinctly suggesting itself to his mind.

He was just near enough to do rather more than guess at Rawdon Wells' good looks; Italian in their romantic darkness, the black sweep of brow and bent lashes, yet somehow English, too—English in the shining neatness of the dead black hair brushed straight back from the square forehead; in the set of the shoulders, and the way of wearing

those well-cut tweed clothes. The man was slim and graceful as he half-sat, half-leaned against the balustrade, with a strutting white peacock in the foreground, a background of gauzy blue like a stage drop, and immense Lebanon cedars that stretched out dark, warning arms against the summer brightness of the sky.

Suddenly Wells glanced up from his letter, and saw the stranger looking at him. That brought him to his feet, and advancing to meet Dagon, the limp which had thrust him out of the war was slightly visible.

'Are you Mr. Dagon from Scotland Yard?' he asked.

He did not smile (what man could smile after a tragedy in his house like that of last night), but his voice had charm. As the detective answered mechanically, he was questioning himself: 'Which of the two should I prefer, if I were a woman? Captain Haste or Sir Rawdon Wells?'

It was oddly difficult to answer, for each was a nearly perfect specimen of his own type; and Dagon could imagine a girl like Eve Carroll loving both at the same time in a different way. 'It might be just a toss-up which she'd choose in the end!' he thought.

Having learned that the new-comer was Dagon, of Scotland Yard, the next question Wells asked was about Pandora Haste.

‘Have you seen Miss Haste?’ he inquired eagerly, yet with an air of weariness, as if he carried a heavy burden.

Dagon watched him as he replied, ‘Miss Haste has escaped from the police station at Ardry-le-Mare.’ Deliberately he refrained from giving his opinion that she had not gone of her own free will. That was for later on, if at all.

The man looked dumbfounded. Then his face lit up. ‘Thank God!’ he said. ‘The child ought never to have been there.’

‘This chap Wells is either sincere, or else he’s some actor!’ the Canadian told himself. And as he so thought he noticed that a sheet of the open letter Wells held in his hand had dropped out from among the rest to flutter down on the stone flagging.

Wells caught sight of it at the same moment. They both stooped; Dagon retrieved the sheet and saw written at the head of it, ‘My dear cousin Don.’ He had learned by practise to observe things quickly, so he noted also yesterday’s date and an address of a London club much frequented by the best class of theatrical men; and all this in the second of time between picking up the paper and handing it to Wells.

In stooping for the lost sheet, the owner of the letter had dropped a second. This had no writing upon it, but was used as a wrapper for several

photographs, apparently proofs. In falling they scattered, and being unmounted would have blown away had not Dagon snatched at them.

‘Allow me!’ he said politely, and glanced from the snapshots of beautiful, smiling Evie Carroll in her wedding dress, to Sir Rawdon’s face.

Wells’ dark skin had flushed, and seeing the detective’s eyes on him, he appeared to hesitate whether he should let the little incident pass in silence or make some explanation. After an instant he decided on the latter course.

‘These photographs were taken yesterday at the wedding reception of Captain and Mrs. Haste, by my cousin, Paolo Magnani,’ he said. ‘I—that is—I’d mentioned to him I was coming down here last evening, and I suppose as he addressed this letter to me at the Court he must have forgotten that I didn’t expect to stop the night. If all had been well, I should have been on my way to New York by this time. But actor-folk never remember other people’s engagements, and seldom their own!’

‘Now, why is Wells annoyed with himself for telling me about his cousin sending the letter here, and why did he stumble about so, trying to get out of the scrape the best way he could?’ pondered Dagon.

‘I’ve often seen your cousin on the screen,’ the detective said aloud. ‘I have heard him called

the handsomest man star, as well as one of the best romantic actors, in the moving picture world.'

He might have added, 'But I didn't know till now that you two were cousins.' Instead, however, he said, 'I see he's a good photographer as well as good to photograph.'

'Yes, he's a keen amateur photographer,' the other agreed, apparently rather surprised that the detective should pursue a subject which seemed to hold no interest for him. 'Paolo asked permission to do these yesterday. That smile on the bride's face looks tragic now—as things are. I suppose you've seen many portraits of—Miss Carroll? She was much photographed for newspapers.'

'I knew her slightly,' Dagon said.

Wells turned an astonished glance upon him, and the detective quietly repeated the information he had given Anson; how, while trying to 'spot' a thief he had posed as a footman in Mrs. Payntor's New York house.

'Miss Carroll wouldn't have remembered me, or recognized me if she had,' Dagon finished. 'But, of course, no one who'd ever seen her could forget what she was like.'

'I'm glad you've seen her!' Wells broke out. 'Tell me, do you think any human being, man or woman, could have the heart to hurt such a lovely

creature? Could you—no matter what the provocation?’

‘I don’t know,’ Dagon answered, his manner changing, so that he spoke, not as an official spy, but as one man to another. ‘I don’t know. I am supposed to have Italian blood in my veins, and whether it’s that or not, anyhow I’ve had black moods when I could imagine myself doing anything.’

‘I have Italian blood in my veins! And I’ve had those moods too,’ said Rawdon Wells. ‘I don’t conceal from you that my mood wasn’t far from black when I knew that I was to be thrown over for my best friend. No use to conceal it! Every one knows or guesses. But I couldn’t have taken revenge on the girl. I couldn’t have hurt Miss Carroll, and if I wouldn’t murder her, I certainly wouldn’t have stooped to kidnapping, especially after she’d married another man. Still—if the circumstances were only a little different, I’d take the guilt on myself instead of letting Pandora Haste be suspected for a single hour.’

‘What do you mean: if the circumstances were a little different?’ asked Dagon. ‘But, of course, don’t answer that question unless you wish.’

‘I do wish,’ said Wells. ‘You are a detective sent here by Scotland Yard to find out what’s

become of Mrs. Haste, and suspicion points my way in spite of what that poor child said. You have a right to suspect me, and perhaps you do. But I can't help feeling if we'd met in a happier way, we should have been friends. The reason is, you look very much like some one I cared for a good deal, and I can't get the resemblance out of my head. So I do wish to talk frankly to you—that is, as frankly as I can, and I'll gladly tell you what my meaning was. It was this: I can't, even for Pandora's sake, say that I was such an abominable villain as to harm the bride of my oldest pal, in my own house, where I'd invited them both. It would be too sickening! Even if Pan—Miss Haste—were still in prison protesting her guilt, I couldn't do that, I'm afraid. She'll be cleared in any case——'

'I'm not so dead sure of that!' Dagon cut in.

'You must clear her—while she keeps out of harm's way,' Wells flung at him, with a sudden challenge.

'I'd like to clear her—mighty well. But—I told you Miss Haste had "escaped." That wasn't quite accurate, according to my view. I believe she was drugged, and kidnapped.'

'Heavens!' the other stared at him. 'What makes you think that?'

'Because her cell smelled of an anæsthetic, and as she was searched by the wardress last night, she

can have had none with her. It wasn't an ordinary anæsthetic. The smell was the same as that on a handkerchief of Mrs. Haste's which the young lady handed to Anson. She said she'd had the stuff from you, as a sample of an invention of yours, sometime ago, and kept it ever since.'

'My anæsthetic in Pan's cell! Do you suspect me of abducting her as well as Mrs. Haste?'

'I suspect you—at present—of neither, Sir Rawdon,' said the detective. 'But as for what Miss Haste said about the handkerchief, if she's merely sacrificing herself to save you, that was rather clever and thoughtful for a young girl, wasn't it?—to pretend that she'd had some of the stuff invented by you, and had kept it by her.'

'Heart-breakingly clever!' groaned Wells, with a visible shudder. 'But what are you leading up to?'

'To asking you some other impertinent questions, if you'll let me,' said Dagon, 'for your good and for hers. For instance—Why did you regret telling me that your cousin knew you were coming down to this house last night?'

Wells caught his lip between his teeth. He did not speak for a few seconds, and the Canadian saw him sharply draw in his breath. Then he said, 'No doubt there'll be many questions I shall gratefully answer, Mr. Dagon. But that—isn't

one of them. It has nothing to do with the affair.'

Instantly Dagon was convinced—he could not have told why—that this small, insignificant circumstance had everything to do with the affair.

PANDORA had a long and intricate dream, about a thousand things. Some of these things were vaguely horrible. At last she thought that Fanny Gillett was determined she should not tell a secret which it was most necessary to tell, in order to save somebody's life. To prevent her crying out, Fanny sat heavily down on her face. Struggling, gasping, the girl woke up.

The dream of Fanny Gillett slipped slowly away into dimness. But in its place a recollection that Eve Carroll—Eve Haste—was dead, tragically dead, writhed in the girl's brain like a living monster. Eve dead, and Rawdon—no, she, Pandora—accused of murder!

'Oh, but that's only part of the dream! It isn't true!' Pan heard herself say out aloud.

She opened her eyes, and stared dazedly up at a ceiling. What ceiling? Where was she, at home in London, or——

It was a low ceiling, and the room—wherever it was—seemed dark with a curious green darkness

like what it must be under the sea. Pandora remembered an aquarium where she'd been taken by Ken, as a treat, when she was a child. The same greenness had been there. It had seemed very mysterious to her, and she had insisted upon talking in whispers, because the aquarium had 'felt like a place of silence.'

This also felt like a place of silence. Maybe she was dreaming, too. Most likely she wasn't really awake yet. But oh, what a comfort that the awful dream about Eve and Don and herself wasn't true! It couldn't—couldn't be true. Yet was it? Details trooped back so vividly now, a hideous swarm of them, like poison bees trying to sting her to death. And that cell in the police station—why, it was real, at least, and she had gone to sleep there!

With this thought Pan sat up suddenly and stared round her.

What a strange ceiling this seemed to be! But it wasn't a ceiling at all. It was water—green water. There were fish in it, swimming. Yet—she was in a room. Oh, certainly it was a dream! There couldn't be a room under the sea, with a glass roof!

But there it was—just that! A glass roof. Pan slid off a very queer, old-fashioned bed such as she had never seen before. Then, tottering a little, she stood on a stone floor with green reflec-

read this book very carefully

tions floating over its greyness, and reaching up on tiptoe she touched the glass.

As she did this, she met the staring, round eyes of a large fish with a silly face and receding chin. It gazed at her for a second, then flashed away, a number of smaller ones following it in alarm.

'How on earth have I come here? Or isn't it earth? Am I dead, and is this the next world?' Pan asked herself, as she dropped back upon the bed and lay very still.

Since the war she had read several much-talked-of books about existence after death, and they all said that at first it seemed much the same as life on earth. You couldn't realize that you were what you would once have called 'dead,' until some who had been much longer on the 'other side' came and told you that you had 'passed over.'

'I wish some one would come and tell me!' the girl said aloud. Her voice sounded so natural, so pettish, like that of a spoiled and tired child, that she thought she must be alive, after all. But then the people in the books had thought that too, and they weren't.

It was easier to imagine how she might have come to such a strange place after death than before. Because she was beginning to realize with gnawings of anguish that the dreams were not

dreams. They were all true. The things had happened—except the part about Fanny Gillett! She had been so desperately unhappy in prison that her heart might simply have stopped beating in sheer grief, and so she might now be dead.

She had heard of people dying like that. And this place with the sea for a roof might be what Roman Catholics called 'Limbo' where you lived on and on for dim years, and were neither happy nor unhappy.

More fish were swimming back. Many had poised themselves to look at her, but if she moved they darted away with a flick of the tail.

'Supposing, though, I'm not dead?' Pan went on questioning herself, when she had sharply pinched her own arm and found that she had all the sensations of flesh and blood.

'Yes, supposing that! Who could have brought her to this weird room, and why should she have been brought?'

The girl tried to reason the matter out.

She had felt very tired in the cell, she remembered, and at last, late at night, had lain down to sleep. Since then—blankness. And now a room under deep, green water!

It must be day by this time, she told herself; for even here it was light enough to see everything

in the place, and catch the glints on fishes' shining scales.

The room was curiously furnished, at all events to Pandora's eyes. The walls were of bricks, narrow, long, brownish coloured bricks. Lying on the low bed, no higher than a divan, the girl could see no doors ; but on each of the four walls hung a piece of tapestry, either one of which might cover a door. These hangings looked old, yet they were not dilapidated, neither were they faded. In such a place, where sunlight could never enter, colours might remain fresh, Pan thought, for centuries ! The floor was bare, save for a tiger skin thrown down in front of the couch, and the only furniture, besides the bed, consisted of a small refectory table of black oak, with beautifully carved legs, and two chairs apparently of the same period.

It was neither cold nor warm in the room, but the bed had a patchwork coverlet made of satins and brocades all in bright contrasting colours, and put together in marvellous designs of stars and wheels. The sheets and a pillow-case were of yellowish linen, thick and silver-smooth. Pan thought of the Sleeping Beauty in the Enchanted Wood. When the Princess waked up after her hundred years of dreams, she might have found herself in some such room as this. But she had been waked by a Prince !

As clouds lifted from her brain, the girl tried sitting up once more as a test to see whether she were really awake or not. Lifting her head from the low pillow, she felt a slight giddiness and nausea; and for the first time she became aware of an odour more powerful than the faint combination of lavender and mustiness that hung round the bed-clothing.

This second odour was not strange to her. As she sniffed it in curiously, it brought back a vivid memory of last night.

‘Don’s new anæsthetic!’ she said to herself.

The first time she had smelled it was in his laboratory, when he had described his experiments to her, and explained the advantage which his invention was supposed to have over chloroform, ether, and other variants much advertised in these modern days. Don was going to call his ‘stuff’ ‘daturiform,’ he had said. The semi-tropical flower *datura* figured in it, but there were two or three more plants, and the formula Don was keeping secret—except from a few British and Italian scientists—until further experiments should have been made both in England and Italy. The advantages were that greater quantities of daturiform could be given than of chloroform or ether, without ill effects upon heart or lungs; a patient could be kept longer under the influence without

danger, and nausea, on waking, even after a heavy dose, was slight and brief.

That day in the laboratory, Pan had laughingly asked to have a little daturiform on her handkerchief, and she had said she 'loved the smell. It was more like a perfume than an anæsthetic.' Whereupon Don had given her a small bottle of the stuff fastened up with a little crimson wax, imprinted by his seal ring.

Last night—or was it last night?—she had had good cause to remember the daturiform. And now, again, it was hanging about her like a cloud.

She could not, she was sure, mistake the odour. Did its presence and the drowsy faintness she felt mean that Don had come to the police station at Ardry-le-Mare, got into her cell by some means, drugged her, and spirited her away while she slept?

Somebody had done the thing! And as Don very jealously guarded the secret of his anæsthetic, it seemed more likely to have been he than any one else. Still, why should he have wished to get her out of prison and hide her, when her testimony could help him to prove his innocence?

The fact that there was a bed with scented linen, and a coverlet for warmth, looked as if her life were not to be threatened; and in any case, Pan

did not feel actively afraid. She cared too little now what happened to her, to be frightened easily ! However, she would have been more or less than human if the strangeness of her surroundings had not pricked her to curiosity. She got up again from the low couch, and lifted the piece of tapestry on the wall against which the head of the bed was set. Nothing was behind it save solid bricks ; and on the opposite wall it was the same. But not so with the hangings on the two walls at the side.

Behind each of these tapestries—which poured out dust as they were lifted—was a door, a low, small door of dark wood which looked like oak. These two doors were destitute of knobs, but had queer old iron latches. The first was immovable, and must—Pan thought—be firmly fastened on the other side ; but the second latch lifted, and the girl opened the door without difficulty.

Her heart jumped at first, for it seemed that here might be a way of escape from this green-lit place of mystery, a way forgotten by her unknown gaoler. When she had seen what was on the other side, however, she realized that there was no hope in that direction. The adjoining space—not much bigger than an ancient ‘ powder closet ’—was a crudely fitted up bath and dressing-room.

‘ Anyhow, they want me to live, whoever they

are,' the girl said to herself aloud. And this supposition was further confirmed when she noticed several dishes on the table in the sleeping-room. There was some cold meat, with bread and cheese; also a carafe containing red wine. The sight of these things made Pandora wonder if her faintness were partly caused by hunger.

'The stuff isn't likely to be poisoned,' she thought. 'They would have got rid of me more simply without taking the trouble to bring me here, if that was their idea!'

She ate a biscuit or two, and poured into a thick, old crystal tumbler a little of the wine which tasted like port.

'I wish I knew whether this were breakfast, or luncheon, or dinner!' she remarked again aloud. And then she noticed that an echo followed her words—an insistent, personal sort of echo, almost like a spirit speaking, invisible, imprisoned in the same room.

Courage and strength began to stream into her body again, after the food and wine—almost too much consciousness of abounding vitality for a girl plunged deep in tragedy. As there could be no way back to happiness for her after last night—even if she were able to escape from this place—Pan did not want to hear the call of youth and life. Still, a certain ebullience did rise within her. It was good to hear her living voice!

‘Where am I?’ she asked of the echo. And promptly it replied. Yet—was it an echo—or something more? Was there another voice farther away behind the echo, a voice that was not an echo at all?

DAGON had ironically told Sergeant Anson that he had 'a dozen theories, each one entirely different from every other.' But something—quite a small, insignificant something—which had happened, banished the lot into the background of his brain. In their stead, a new theory stepped forward.

Perhaps in its turn this last would be dismissed, and a half-abandoned rival beckoned out of obscurity to take its place; but for the present it lured, startled, fascinated the detective. He dared not let his mind dwell upon it too much. He wished to keep in touch with all sides of the subject. And though he started a new note-book in honour of the new theory, he neither starred nor emphasized it there. No one save himself, looking through the jottings, could have guessed in which person named Dagon felt the most absorbing professional interest.

The Canadian had a way of writing down questions addressed to himself. Staring at these in black and white seemed to force answers 'out of

the static,' as he had called it since a short apprenticeship to wireless telegraphy. Sometimes the answers were wrong; but by the time he began to see their wrongness he had often dashed the real solution of the puzzle on the next page of the book.

The day following his visit to Hidden Hall Court and Ardry-le-Mare, the small volume which he dubbed 'My New Theory Note Book' would have appeared to any other eye than his, a hotch-potch. To Dagon, however, it was clear enough, and bade fair later to be illuminative.

The detective had returned to London on the quiet, in order to develop the photographs of the smudged finger marks, also those he had discovered on the bench in Pandora Haste's cell. He had brought to town in addition a tiny sample of the dried and clotted blood found on the wall under the tapestries, and the least charred of the bones retrieved from the furnace.

As for the blood, the microscopic tests made showed it to be that of a human being, young, in a state of normal health, a member of a white race.

The bones taken from the furnace fire by order of Anson, on the contrary, brought suspicion up against a blank wall. Burnt as they were, almost disintegrated in the furious flames, it was still possible for an expert to pronounce them portions of a man's skeleton.

This discovery gave a singularly piquant note to Dagon's book ; no one knew yet of the mysterious—perhaps tragic affair at Hidden Hall Court. It was being 'kept dark' for the moment by Dagon's request as well as Kennedy Haste's earnest wish, for in case a simple explanation of the seeming tragedy should be found, the happenings of that terrible night need never be known beyond a small circle.

The detective was 'officially' in the country still, so it seemed unlikely that he would be disturbed, and he was 'concentrating' with all his might, hoping for one of his sudden inspirations. Indeed, he felt that he was on the way to one, and hoped to accelerate his progress by gazing at a row of photographs. The hour was late in the afternoon, and though his rooms overlooked a somewhat dismal street off the Strand, Dagon liked their convenience.

It seemed that nothing could reach him from outside. He wasn't likely to be disturbed even by the telephone bell, as none of his friends save Kennedy Haste had been told of his movements, and Haste would not try to communicate with him.

On the big table which supplemented his American desk, and stood beside it, were five framed cabinet portraits, four of the frames cheap things merely designed as supports, to keep the photo-

graphs in an upright position. The fifth was different. This Dagon had framed in silver, and had given it the place of honour in the middle ; Pandora Haste's portrait.

He had obtained it from the house which she called home—the house at whose door she had been left as a baby. He had asked Haste for the picture as a loan, and it had been sent to him by messenger.

A portrait of Sir Rawdon Wells he had obtained in the same way ; also one of Fanny Gillett dressed as a V.A.D. A picture of Wells' cousin, Paolo Magnani, he had bought at a shop where photographs of theatrical favourites were sold ; and one of Evie Carroll had been already in his possession. He had appropriated it in the days of his disguise as Mrs. Payntor's footman, and it had gone with him through the war.

There they all stood, side by side on his desk, and Dagon apostrophized them in the intervals between jotting down 'second thoughts' in his new note-book, with a stylographic pen.

Under the heading of 'Sir R. W.' he had already scrawled several paragraphs ; but he knew his notes by heart, and there was no need to refresh his mind by reading them over.

'Whether or no R. W. had any hand in the disappearance of Eve Carroll, the man has a strange secret of some sort concerning his visit to the Court on her wedding night,' Dagon now wrote. 'R. W.

says he had forgotten some important papers which he needed to take with him to America. This I don't believe. Too obvious an excuse! Says also that being on the spot he thought it well to burn a lot of things which were no longer of any use. I do believe he burnt the things, but not because they weren't of use. He must have made up the furnace fire himself, and he wouldn't have taken that trouble for nothing. The burning is immensely important in this business. If I can find out which things he really burned, and which somebody else burned, if there was somebody else, I shall have gone a long way on the right road.

'Apropos of the burning. That skeleton in the furnace was a cute trick if R. W. has an enemy who would go any length to injure him. But it wasn't quite cute enough. Either the person who planned it couldn't get the skeleton of a woman, or didn't suppose that it would be possible to detect the difference in a few bones after they'd been nearly burnt to cinders. There could be two objects only in burning that skeleton (putting aside the idea that R. W. himself may have done it for some unknown reason); one, to make it appear that Eve had been murdered; the other, to make it appear that R. W. was the murderer.

'Now, what would happen to R. W. if it could be clearly proved that he had lured Mrs. Haste into some secret trap in his own house, killed her, and

attempted to cremate her body in a furnace ?

‘He would, of course, be hanged.

‘Was enough evidence built up against R. W. to convict him ?

‘If the skeleton hadn’t turned out to be that of a man, thus suggesting a trick, there might have been enough, provided that the girl Pandora Haste had not taken the guilt upon herself, by bringing forward several proofs.

‘Pandora Haste. Is she capable of killing or kidnapping the wife of her adopted brother, as she intimates that she has done ?

‘Possibly she might kill in a moment of rage. Any hot-headed person might do that. She could do nothing of the sort in cold blood. Kidnapping must be carried out in cold blood, therefore P. H. did not kidnap Eve.

‘If P. H. lied, why did she ?

‘Dashed if I can see any motive except love for R. W., and a wish to save him at any cost to herself.

‘Would a girl make such a sacrifice for a man known to be in love with another woman ? If she would, she’d be an unusual kind of girl. Most women will do anything for the men who love them, and jolly little for those who don’t. Still less for those head over ears in love with some one else.

‘Even if P. H. was willing to damn herself for

the sake of R. W., doesn't that mean she knew the proof against him was overwhelming, and that without help from outside he was surely lost? That's the way the thing appears to me at present, which pretty well means, she must have been acquainted with other facts that would look black against R. W.—facts that haven't yet come out in evidence.

'The disappearance of Pandora Haste. To escape would be to contradict herself. She had herself arrested, let's say, because she wished for one reason or another to be thought guilty of "doing away" with Eve Carroll, as she put it. Why, then, vanish before she'd had time to establish her own guilt in the mind of any one?

'Was she kidnapped?

'If she was, the man or woman responsible for Eve's disappearance or death did the trick. He—or she—wanted R. W. to be convicted, and feared the scheme would fail because of P. H. if she stuck to her guns.

'The Unknown. Who is this person who wants R. W. convicted, and, if possible, hanged? Is there such a person at all?

'Is it likely that motive would be a desire for revenge for some injury, or for advantages to be gained by R. W.'s death?

'This is the Big Question. Dagon, old Thing, you've got to find the answer. If you can find it,

you may also find Pandora Haste. Also Eve Carroll, if she lives.

‘ Acts of the Unknown (taking it for granted that such a person exists) :

‘ Making the footprint in blood on the floor of the tapestry boudoir, and certainly using a boot of R. W.’s for the purpose ; which boot (with its fellow) was burned later in the cellar furnace. By the way, the fact that the unknown knew about the secret door under the tapestry and the furnace in the cellar, as well as the fire kindled by R. W. (or on his orders), proves intimate acquaintance with the old house.

‘ To get human blood isn’t too easy. Probably the Unknown tapped his (or her) own. Which would explain why there was so little ; not a drop to waste ! It wouldn’t have done to take enough to produce faintness or make a serious wound. That would have led to suspicion.

‘ More acts of the Unknown :

‘ Making the finger prints on the wall. Experiments have proved that finger prints can be accurately copied by a simple process. They are not, therefore, to be taken as proof-positive in these days, without other evidence in conjunction. What a blow to the Unknown to have his (or her) carefully manufactured proofs against R. W. destroyed in one fell swoop of a girl’s hand ! That is, assuming the innocence of P. H., and her wish

to incriminate herself in order to save R. W.'

'Fanny Gillett, V.A.D.'

Dagon wrote this name, and gazed for a long time very thoughtfully at the portrait of the young woman who had confessed her love for Capt. Kennedy Haste.

So far there wasn't a scrap of evidence to connect her with the disappearance of Haste's bride, except that she had been caught paying a surreptitious visit to Mrs. Haste's bedroom. That visit she had explained, and though her avowed motive was not one to boast of, there was less guilt in it than flagrant bad taste. Still, Dagon could not get the conviction out of his head that there was another reason, apart from the one or two she alleged, for Miss Gillett's presence at Hidden Hall Court on the night of Captain Haste's wedding. If he were right about this, he would never learn the truth from the girl. He must find it out, if at all, in some less obvious way.

Then, there was that mother of hers, the utterly unsuitable housekeeper at the Court! The detective had no photograph of her, but the white, tragic features were printed on his memory. He could see the frightened eyes, the thin, pale face, the woman's quick, nervous glances over her shoulders as if she saw something which no one else could see.

'If I believed in ghosts, I should say she was

haunted,' Dagon thought. 'But perhaps she believes in 'em, and thinks she's haunted. Which would have much the same effect on the nervous system!'

What had Mrs. Gillett done that would make her afraid of being haunted, and why was she the housekeeper at Hidden Hall Court?

Dagon felt that there was a mystery about the middle-aged woman, which might connect with some old scandal of the Wells family. Of course, even if there were such a mystery, it might have nothing to do with the Haste affair; but the detective was determined to let no thread drop. He considered, therefore, that it would be important not to lose sight of Mrs. Gillett and her daughter. This was only a side-issue, however, of the new theory as it appeared to him.

The name of Paolo Magnani came directly after that of Fanny Gillett's on his list, and Dagon studied the actor's not unfamiliar features with keen interest.

Magnani and his cousin, Rawdon Wells, were of somewhat similar type, which was not surprising, as they were closely related. Dagon wasn't sure just how closely, for he had never before interested himself in the matter. He had been told, however, since the Carroll-Haste wedding that Wells' Italian mother and Magnani's mother had been sisters.

Both men were tall and of unusually graceful bearing, but Wells was leaner, and more soldierly than Magnani. Magnani was more picturesquely handsome, Wells harder and sterner of feature; and both—though they were young and much of the same age—suggested Dante as he must have been in youth.

The cousins were said to be very fond of each other, and Wells was known to admire Magnani's talent as an actor. Had not the master of Hidden Hall Court stumbled over an explanation and then refused to go further with it? Dagon would not even have thought of linking Magnani with the case. As it was, he was bent on finding out all he could about the moving picture star. Had Magnani known Eve Carroll well? Could he have been in love with her? Was he jealous of his cousin in any way? Even if so, would he not have more to gain from Rawdon Wells, alive and prosperous, able to bestow gifts, than from a convicted criminal?

Last of the five photographs came that of Eve Carroll herself; and Dagon stared into the large soft eyes of the portrait.

'What has become of you?' he said aloud. 'Have you been kidnapped? Are you dead? Or, have you played a trick on your husband and the rest of us, and run away? For your own sake, I wish that might be true. Yet—well, I may be

an ass—probably am. But that doesn't suit my latest theory.'

As he spoke the words, suddenly he saw how such a trick of Eve's might suit the theory, after all. Somehow or other she might have been induced or forced to run off with the person he was calling the 'Unknown.' Although in writing of that individual in his note-book, Dagon invariably damped his own enthusiasm by putting into a parenthesis 'him or her,' he was inwardly sure of the Unknown's sex.

'See Mrs. Payntor to test the theory,' he had begun to scrawl at last, when, to his astonishment, the telephone bell rang.

‘**W**HO besides Haste knows I’m in town?’ Dagon wondered, still aloud, for talking to himself—and even abusing himself—was a habit of his in his rather lonely life. The detective was half-minded not to answer the call, but changed his mind as the ’phone bell rang again. He lifted the receiver to his ear, expecting to be bored by some stupidity, but his weary ‘Hello!’ was answered by a voice so peculiar as to suggest disguise and instantly to pique his interest. The speaker might be a woman wishing to be taken for a man, or a man posing as a woman.

‘Is that Mr. Dagon himself?’ some one inquired.

‘Yes. Who’s calling?’

‘Who I am doesn’t matter. And you won’t be able to find out, because I’m using a public telephone. Though, of course, you can try, if you like to waste time. It isn’t my name that’s important. It’s my message. As an admirer of your talent who doesn’t wish you to fail ridiculously after all your successes, I warn you solemnly, as you value

your reputation, to keep off the Haste-Carroll case. Make any excuses you choose. But keep off. Otherwise, ruin—perhaps death for you.’

‘Thanks for the advice,’ Dagon retorted, extremely puzzled but speaking with airy indifference of tone. ‘Please add to your goodness by stating why I should keep off the grass—I mean the case.’

No answer was vouchsafed to this question. Dagon repeated it several times, in varied forms, but silence answered, with the odd, impish echo of the telephone. At last, softly whistling, the detective hung up the receiver.

He believed that the voice had in all probability called him from a public telephone. The speaker would have been a fool to run an unnecessary risk, especially when dealing with a detective. ‘Now which of my lot, if any of them, wanted to frighten me?’ Dagon asked himself, casting his eyes over each of the photographs in turn. Whoever it was might have saved himself or herself the trouble, for instead of being frightened the detective felt doubly keen. But, of course, the person who had called him up wouldn’t stop there! Something else would happen. Dagon would have given a good deal to know what.

His new theory, however, was not shaken. In fact, if anything it was strengthened. But it was very young still, only just out of the shell, and

covered with yellow down, as he expressed it to himself. There were almost as many ways of testing the theory as there were ramifications of the strange case on which he was engaged, and Dagon didn't mean to miss one of either.

The odd thing was that, so far as he was aware, Captain Haste was the one person who knew he was paying this short visit to London. And Captain Haste was the one person of the 'lot' (as he put it) whom Dagon did not suspect at least of ulterior motives or hiding some secret knowledge. Also he had an appointment with Haste later on. Therefore, Haste was also the one person who could not now have called him up.

Ken had loathed the necessity of remaining at Hidden Hall Court, and had been well-nigh driven insane by it. Yet his conviction that Eve was living and in the neighbourhood remained as obstinate as ever it had been since his first black mood of despair had passed. Some one—if not Rawdon Wells, then another—had shut Eve up in a secret place, and wished him—Kennedy Haste—to believe her dead. But he would not be fooled. And he would stop in the house until he or Dagon—to whom he had taken an almost pathetic fancy—should hit upon the truth. It was peculiarly disagreeable for Haste having Wells about the place, suspecting him as he did. But Ken realized the police point of view, that Wells must remain on the

spot. And after all, he argued, Wells' presence made his own more than ever essential—as a watcher. It was not necessary that they should meet ; and the Court was big enough for them to keep apart.

Dagon, however, had asked Haste if he would object to show him letters from Miss Carroll written just before her marriage, as some chance word might be enlightening to the mind of a detective. Ken had a bundle of such letters in town, and being told that Dagon had to go to London for a day, offered to go also and get the parcel.

'Can Haste have mentioned my being here?' he wondered. 'I told him I didn't want it known, as I wished to be free and undisturbed. But he may have spoken of it to some one he didn't think would disturb me.'

It was easy, it seemed, to obtain an answer to this question from headquarters. He had made an appointment to call at Haste's house, ostensibly to get a glimpse of Eve Carroll's letters, but in reality for another object quite as important to him, if not more so. This appointment was for an hour hence, but he was sure that Haste would be at home, and he could not resist calling him up on the 'phone.

'Can you see me now, instead of in an hour's time, as we arranged?' Dagon asked.

'Certainly, I would prefer it,' the answer came.

And the detective started out in search of a taxi without an instant's delay.

Kennedy Haste's house was in North Audley Street. He had lived there only since his engagement to Eve, at which time he had sold the big and somewhat gloomy old home of his boyhood. Eve had selected the new house herself, or, at least, had said that she would like to live in North Audley Street, which had been enough for Ken. Furniture, decorations and everything had been chosen to please her, except in the suite which Ken had set apart for his adopted sister, Pan.

The first note struck, even on entering the hall, was gay modernity. Dagon was shown into a drawing-room with a black carpet, and furniture mostly of old Chinese lacquer, much of it red. There were green curtains, with splashes of purple embroidery and wonderful iridescent bowls containing fantastic coloured fruits which might have been stolen from the stage at a performance of *Chu Chin Chow*. Poor little lonely Eve. She would have been a witchlike vision of beauty here, in the wonderful gowns that she affected. Where was she—living or dead? It was as if a voice whispered the question in Dagon's ear.

After a moment's waiting he was taken to another room, a combination of library and smoking-room, and there Haste met him at the door—a pale and haggard Haste.

‘This house is killing me!’ he said. ‘It’s worse than at that haunted hole of Rawdon Wells’—she and I chose everything together. I can hear her calling me to save her from some horror. I’m glad you came early. I want to get away—to get back to Essex. Anything may have happened there while I’ve been gone—who knows?’

‘I know that nothing has happened to interest you,’ Dagon tried to soothe him. ‘But you can get back as soon as you like, so far as I’m concerned. I see how you must feel here. But didn’t you tell me, when you spoke of your new house, that Miss Pandora Haste had furnished her suite entirely with things from your old home? Why shouldn’t we both go to her rooms, where there’ll be nothing to call up painful memories for you, while I look through the letters you’re going to let me have?’

‘Not a bad idea,’ said Haste. ‘The sight of those old things of the past may cool my nerves a bit. At present they feel like red-hot wires with the ends cut off.’

He took from a drawer in a gorgeous Empire desk an olive-wood box, about the size of an ordinary glove box, and then showed Dagon the way upstairs. Pan’s suite was at the top of the house, for an extension at the back gave plenty of room for servants. Kennedy Haste opened a door which was not locked, and ushered the detective into a room which might have been the ‘parlour’

of an early Victorian woman—but an early Victorian of much individual taste.

‘Pandora is only my adopted sister, as you know,’ said Ken, ‘yet she adored the old house and everything in it. I never cared! But she cried like a baby when I decided to sell and to let most of the furniture go with the place. You see, this house isn’t really large enough for the big, solid things of my father’s day; and Eve was unimaginable against a Victorian background.’

Dagon looked about with intense interest. His heart was beating fast. He felt as children feel in playing a game of ‘hide-and-seek,’ when some one calls out ‘You’re warm!’

‘Early Victorian things are rather splendid, I think,’ he said, trying to be calm. ‘Now, that secretary bookcase, for instance, there between the windows, with the cupboard underneath, and twisted pillars running up the sides.’

‘That old thing is a special pet of Pan’s,’ answered Haste, distracted for an instant from the gnawing torture of his loss. ‘She keeps all the souvenirs of her début into our family, in that cupboard.’

This was precisely what Dagon had been leading up to as well as he could without asking questions, and now he knew precisely what he wanted to know. ‘So far, so good!’ he told himself. But it was not far enough or good enough yet. He had

further to go. Yet he must not force the pace.

Haste invited him to sit down on a huge old sofa where Dagon could imagine a girl curling up for a nap, or to read a novel, among the cushions of old-fashioned chintz. And it was of Pandora Haste he thought as he took certain letters which her adopted brother selected from the olive-wood box.

‘I never expected to let any one see Eve’s precious little letters,’ Ken said. ‘But if you imagine you can discover anything useful from reading them—why, of course, I’d be a fool to hold them back. There are just a few here that are too sacred—and nothing in them, anyhow, except about our two selves. But make what you can of the rest.’

They were charming letters—Eve at her best. But her most ardent worshipper could hardly say that she was not a flirt, and here and there the nature of the flirt peeped out from these perfumed pages.

‘Poor Rawdon Wells! I’m afraid I have been rather horrid to him. But it’s all your fault, Ken, for coming into my life and making me love you when I was just on the edge of falling in love with him—or was it with his house? Nowadays I think it must have been only the house; for I can’t believe I could ever really have cared with all my heart and soul about any man except you. Oh, dear, it’s frightening, though, breaking the

news to Rawdon. His eyes can be terrible. I never realized how Italian he is till now, and primitive and all that. But, thank goodness, we do live in the twentieth century. I wouldn't go back into—say, the sixteenth or even seventeenth with Rawdon Wells for anything on earth. It would be too dangerous. Even you couldn't save me from him then.'

This was in one letter. In another Eve referred to some man whose name she did not mention :

'When I was a naughty little girl,' she wrote, 'I used to cry for things I couldn't have, and when they were given to me I didn't want them any more. Alas, I never got over that sort of thing until you cured me by making me want you for always. Yes, the "Idol" was a bad case. I was wild when I thought he didn't care—or only for my money. When I found out that he loved me—and what he was really like when he was in love—oh, Ken, he made me sick, and I told him so. Afterwards we patched up a peace, rather than people should talk—anyhow that was my reason—but I shall never forget as long as I live.'

Before he made any comment, Dagon finished reading all the letters Haste had handed him, of which there were eight ; but in no others was there anything that interested him, except one allusion to Pan : 'I'm sorry she feels about me the way she does, but I can't blame the poor kid much, con-

sidering everything—and one or two things she may have been told by—you know who ! I shall try to win her—yes, try as I never tried when I was flirting my hardest !—after you and I have had our honeymoon in that wonderful house of poor Rawdon Wells'. Then maybe she'll change her mind and live with us, in her own Victorian suite, rather than do as she threatens now and go out into the wide, wide world, far away from Yours lovingly !'

So, Pandora Haste had threatened to leave her adored Ken and his wife !

And Rawdon Wells had been Italian and 'primitive,' and his eyes had been 'terrible,' when Eve had broken the news to him of her engagement to his friend, Kennedy Haste !

But it was the letter concerning the unnamed 'Idol' which interested Dagon most.

'Are you willing to tell me who is this man Miss Carroll referred to ?' he asked, pointing out the passage to Haste.

Ken read the words and flushed up to the roots of his brown hair. 'Ask me something else,' he said, 'I can't tell you that.'

'Do you mean you can't—or you won't ?'

'I—am afraid I've forgotten that particular one. There were—so many chaps who fell in love with Miss Carroll,' Ken stammered.

Dagon knew that he had not forgotten ; and Haste

probably knew that he knew. But the detective let the subject drop. Instead he said, 'Just now you gave me permission to "ask you something else."' Well, I take you at your word. We're in Miss Haste's own sitting-room. You tell me that in the wardrobe there are souvenirs of the time when she first came to you. Will you let me see those things?'

Haste stared. 'But what possible connexion can they have with this case?'

'They may have more than you think,' said Dagon.

HASTE took back the letters hurriedly, as if he feared more questions, and then, glad of the change of subject, found the key of the cupboard in a drawer of the secretary above, where no doubt he had seen Pan place it. This new affair had little interest for him. He could not conceive it possible that the souvenirs of Pandora's babyhood should have the remotest connexion with the disappearance of Eve Carroll. His glowing opinion of Dagon's talent paled slightly because of the detective's request. But there was no reason for refusing, so Ken rather indifferently unlocked and threw open the cupboard doors.

'I suppose you've heard the whole story,' he said, 'about the box being left at our door, and all that. The box—I remember it quite distinctly—was like a boy's school box, but rather small. It was thrown away by our servants, I suppose; but everything in it was kept; and there's the lot in that doll's trunk which was one of the great treasures of Pan's childhood.'

'Allow me!' exclaimed the detective, and

stooping took from the one shelf in the cupboard a miniature trunk got up to resemble the fashionable travelling-boxes of a Paris maker. It was not heavy, though it was of a good size, two feet long by one in height perhaps, and Dagon placed it on a table. It was unlocked, but thinking of the girl he hesitated to lift the lid, and Haste impatiently did so.

A delicious perfume of pot-pourri rose to the nostrils of the two young men. And though Haste had moods of fiercely doubting his adopted sister, his heart melted as he looked at her precious guarded treasures of the past. The trunk had a tray, in which reposed a doll which had been a present from him on one of Pan's birthdays. It had eyes which opened and shut, real eyelashes and curly hair which could be brushed. Pan had named the doll after him and herself: 'Pandora Kennedy.' It lay on a neat pile of its wardrobe, made by the child's own hands, with here and there a ribbon bag of pot-pourri. Ken removed the tray, and Dagon's eager eyes saw first, a fleecy Shetland shawl, then a silky blanket striped with red, white and green.

'There! the poor little kid was wrapped in those when we found her!' Haste said. 'I suppose the rest of the things are underneath. Examine them as much as you like.'

The dark face of the Canadian had flushed at

sight of the silk blanket; but Haste did not notice his change of colour. He was thinking of Eve, and wondering why the detective had said so little about the letters which, after all, he had come to the house expressly to see. The fellow had appeared to be somewhat impressed by two of those letters; yet now he seemed far more 'intrigued' by these odd trifles which, surely, could have no bearing whatever on the case.

Almost reverently Dagon touched the blanket. Before looking at what lay beneath, he held the silky stuff with its bright stripes between his hands. Perhaps he was trying to make use of the faculty he had described to Anson: that of seeing an image of the person most intimately associated with the thing touched. Or else it might be that the blanket fascinated him because of the Italian colours, and because he must have known—if he knew anything about Italian manufactures—that the blanket had been woven in the land he claimed as his birthplace. He could hardly have decided on such scant evidence that Pandora Haste, the foundling, was a compatriot of his, for these Italian blankets were intended more for export than for home use, and thousands were sold every year in most countries of Europe. They had been cheap in the old days before the war, too, and therefore would have been quite within the means of a poor mother.

Whatever his motive was, Dagon gazed at the little striped silk blanket for several moments with an odd, abstracted gaze. Then, still with the air of one who feared to profane a shrine, he examined in turn the tiny garments which were Pan's only relics of her unknown babyhood. They were commonplace things enough, cheap and rather coarse; but a small scarlet cloak of woollen stuff, with a mother-o'-pearl button at the neck, and lined with cotton flannel which imitated ermine, held him spellbound.

'One would think you could read the history of my adopted sister's birth in that hideous little cloak,' Haste said.

Dagon actually started. 'Oh, I don't go so far as that!' he exclaimed, his sense of humour not in the least aroused. 'But I confess it interests me—for special reasons. May I take the cloak home, and keep it a short time? I'll promise to bring it safely back in the same condition as now. I don't believe Miss Haste would object, do you?'

'Oh, certainly, take it,' said Ken. 'I'll be responsible for giving you permission. It would be different with Eve's letters if you wanted them. I couldn't bring myself to part with those for ten minutes!'

'I remember every word in the letters that I need to remember,' Dagon assured him.

‘ And do you think they’ve helped you to draw any conclusion ? ’

‘ One of them has helped me, I believe.’

‘ Which one, if I may ask ? ’

‘ The one you refused to tell me about,’ the detective replied drily.

Haste frowned. ‘ Be careful you don’t jump to wrong conclusions,’ he warned the other.

‘ I will,’ answered Dagon. ‘ I’ll be very careful indeed. And now I must get back to my diggings, as I have a good deal to do. Thank you for lending me your sister’s cloak. I do really think it has a bearing on the case ; and it may actually help me to guess where she is now.’

Since the Canadian had decided to pursue his profession in London, he had sent to New York—his last abode before the war—for his few belongings. These had arrived, and were now in his lodgings. His books had been unpacked, but he kept many of his things in a big American cabin-trunk that he had covered over with a silk blanket much like Pan’s, a blanket he had bought because it was Italian. Now he rummaged through a mass of papers and pulled out a parcel done up carefully in waterproof cloth. This he opened, spreading it flat on a table and gazing at the contents ; a quaintly made little waistcoat of a size to fit a child of three or four years old. It was made of scarlet cloth, had four mother-o’-pearl buttons down

the front, and was lined with black-tufted, white cotton flannel that crudely imitated ermine.

Beside this he laid the tiny cloak which had enveloped the baby left at the Hastes' door. The red cloth, the cotton flannel, and even the buttons were precisely the same.

'My God, I felt it. I knew it!' Dagon cried aloud. His mind rushed back to a picture which he often saw in dreams, especially if he were tired or depressed, or if he feared failure in some undertaking. He wondered whenever he waked from this dream, which always happened suddenly, with a start, whether the picture were not really something remembered, something earlier in his life than any of the more assured memories. They—the catalogued memories which formed a more or less connected chain—began in a street. He was crying because he was hungry. 'Vanno povero Vanno!' he had wailed, for he was 'Vanno,' a pet name for Giovanni, or John. How he had got into that street he'd never known; but he thought he had been on a ship, and there had been a very big man who seemed a giant, sometimes cross and sometimes kind to him. In the street a much smaller and very different man had spoken to the crying child; but Dagon had not been able to understand English then. This man had taken his hand and they had walked to a house not far off, where the man had apparently wished to keep

the wanderer ; but a woman with a loud voice would not let him stay. Out he and the man had gone again, and they had ridden in a tram to a big building where a great many children lived. It was a foundling asylum, and there the boy had spent several years. The grown-ups had been good to him, and when he was old enough to go away and work on a farm, they had given him the red waistcoat with imitation ermine lining. It had evidently been made at home by some loving hand, and might possibly help him to find his lost family some day—who could tell ?

The dream-picture was connected with this queer little garment, and the oddest thing about it was, that he had had the dream before the waistcoat had been returned to him—before he had recalled its existence. He saw himself in a garden with a beautiful woman who was weeping. In her arms she held a baby wrapped in a red cloak exactly like the red waistcoat he had on, and of which he was very proud. The woman's face was clear as a cameo before Dagon's eyes in the dream, and he knew that he loved her dearly. He liked the baby too, but only as if it were a doll, and he was not thinking of it at all in the garden, except that it had a cloak like his beautiful waistcoat. There were lovely tall, straight trees, almost black against blue sky, and there were many flowers

hanging in festoons over a low, pink house. The group stopped at a grey gate and looked back at the trees and the house. And the dream stopped there too, with a feeling of loss and sadness as Dagon waked.

How stupid Captain Haste, and Sir Rawdon Wells, and Anson had all been, not to realize at once the likeness between him and the girl known as Pandora Haste! Both Haste and Anson had exclaimed, 'Who is it you look like?' and Rawdon Wells had stared at him in a puzzled way, the same as a spoken question. It seemed incredible that the answer had not sprung into their heads. But, Dagon said to himself now, perhaps it had, anyhow, into the heads of Haste and Wells, who knew the girl so intimately, whereas Anson had seen her only once or twice. When those two recognized the fact that Pandora Haste and the young detective from Canada were singularly alike, possibly they had not cared to mention their discovery to the person most concerned. But he, Dagon, had been startled by the resemblance the moment he saw Pandora's picture.

Even then his instinct had spoken, telling a story to which his reason would not listen. He had not, however, associated the dream with the disturbing likeness. It was only when he saw the Italian silk blanket, and then the little red cloak with the black-spotted white lining, that

the picture of the three figures in the lost garden flashed back.

Now he knew that Pandora Haste had been the baby in the red cloak ; he, the little boy in the red waistcoat, and the beautiful woman who wept her ' Addio ' to the pink house, their mother.

Dagon did not feel that he was neglecting his duty as a detective engaged to solve the mystery of Hidden Hall Court, in turning his whole attention upon his own affairs where they touched those of Pandora Haste. They were not, something told him, entirely separate from the Eve Carroll affair, and his soul was bent upon seeking the link.

The garden with the pink house and climbing flowers and tall dark trees had been somewhere in Italy. He was sure of that, because he had been able to talk only Italian as a child of about four, when he had been picked up in a street in Halifax. But it was not likely that he had come straight to that port from an Italian one. No ships sailed directly between the two. It was probable, therefore, that he and the baby had been taken from Italy to England. There, something must have happened to her—or else he had been stolen, otherwise there would be more dreams of the past with the face of a beautiful, dark woman in them.

Could the big man on the ship, whom Dagon vaguely recalled, have been father to him and the baby in the red cloak ? No, he thought not. The

man had not behaved like a father. He must have been a stranger hired to play the part.

'He brought me to Halifax on that ship on purpose to lose me,' the detective told himself, aloud. 'And somebody lost the baby too. But I begin to see it wasn't chance which took that Somebody to the door of the Hastes' house in Eaton Place. There was a reason. Somebody knew the Hastes.'

And so his brooding mind strayed from the house where the baby had been left, to Hidden Hall Court where, at that time, an Italian woman—Sir Rawdon Wells' mother—had reigned as mistress.

Two small children thrown upon the world—brother and sister; one in London, one in Halifax. What could connect them and their fate with that strange old house in Essex? And why did the detective feel so strongly that Eve Carroll would not have disappeared if those two children had not existed? All he knew was, that he felt sure it was so; and that Hidden Hall Court had a tragic secret for him as well as for Kennedy Haste. Dagon was wild now to unravel both.

‘**W**HO is there? Who is calling?’ Pandora Haste cried, her ear against the wall, as the echo—which had seemed to her more than an echo—died away.

Again came the muffled answer—if answer it was. But it was very far off. It sounded no nearer now that her ear was at the wall than when she had stood in the middle of the room.

Her heart hammering, the girl went from wall to wall, and listened behind the screens of tapestry. There was very little difference between one side of the room or another for the sound, but she imagined that the voice came more distinctly from beyond the wall where was the locked door.

‘If there’s some one there, wait long enough after I’ve spoken for the echo to pass,’ Pandora called out loudly and distinctly. ‘Then answer, and I can be sure.’

‘Now,’ she thought, ‘this will be the test. And if there is some one, surely it must be a prisoner like myself. Otherwise, whoever it is

would have kept still or else tried to scare me, and stop my making a noise.'

Again the echo followed her words ; but before there was time for the voice-test, something moved behind the locked door. There was a sound as of another door being opened and cautiously shut, a sound such as the sliding door of a big wardrobe might make in being pushed back and forth in its groove.

The thought shot through the girl's brain that the mystery of her kidnapping would now be revealed, for better, for worse ! The door was being unlocked. She heard the noise of a sliding bolt, and with a quick inspiration pushed her body close against the wall so that, even if she could not escape, she might hope for a glimpse of what lay beyond the door.

Suddenly it opened, and hardly knowing what she did Pan sprang boldly forward, striving to dodge a thrust-out arm. But the arm was strong, and pushed her back so violently that she might have fallen had she not caught at the tapestry. It was so dim behind this curtain, and so black was the space beyond the door that she could see nothing on the other side. Even the owner of the arm was but a dark shadow to her eyes, until she had been forcibly detached from her hold on the hangings and thrust into the room. Then, in the greenish light, Pan saw a tall, stoop-shoul-

dered man wearing a queer, old-fashioned cape-overcoat, and a soft, wide-brimmed hat. His face was hidden with a black mask which appeared to be made of one or two thicknesses of crape. Even his eyes were covered, but the girl caught a faint sparkle from them, like that of a star filmed over by a thin, black cloud.

Once more the impression of a dream came back ; for wasn't this figure too fantastic to be real ? And there couldn't in any real world be such a room, with glass for a roof and fish swimming over it in deep, green water ! Above all, there couldn't be such a man as this masked, cloaked creature, except in a queer melodrama. And yet—Pan felt so vividly awake now ! Her heart was beating so hard, and her breath was coming in such short gasps. She must give up the hope that she was caught in a dream.

Now the creature had turned away. He was sticking a key into the door—and taking it out again, having ostentatiously grated it in a rusty lock. Pan thought that if only she had a hammer she would try to stun him as he stooped, and steal the key. But she had no weapon at all—unless she attacked the enemy with a chair. There was no time to run across the room and get one, however ; and besides, the struggle would be too unequal ! It would be sure to end in failure for her.

‘ Have you come here to kill me ? ’ she panted.

The man wheeled round and stood quietly surveying her through the crape mask, a large key in his hand.

‘I should not have taken the trouble to bring you to this place if I wished to kill you, except under great provocation,’ he said in French.

‘What makes you think I understand French?’ Pan flung back in English.

‘All young girls of your class do understand it,’ came the confident answer.

Pan gazed intently at the hand with the key, trying to recognize it. There was a great deal of character in hands, she had always thought, and had boasted that she could identify those of any friend, though his face were hidden and the figure concealed. But this man’s hands told her nothing. They were very brown, and curiously stiff-looking, like the hands of clay models for statues. It occurred to the girl that, if she were nearer and could see more clearly through the green dimness of the room, she would find that queer, dead look was given by very tight-fitting rubber gloves such as surgeons wear to perform operations.

‘You do not know me,’ the man announced. ‘It is useless to stare at my hands. It would be simpler to ask who I am.’

‘You wouldn’t tell me,’ Pan said. ‘If you were willing for me to find out who you are, you

would not be wearing a mask and—rubber gloves.’

‘Nevertheless there is a name by which you can call me if you choose,’ he persisted. ‘It is “Masquer.” I have come here not to kill you, but to give you good advice. It will be for the second time. I wrote you a letter——’

‘Oh, you wrote that letter I found in the cell!’ Pan broke in. ‘You’re an enemy of Rawdon Wells! You want me to do what will ruin him.’

‘He is already ruined.’

‘I won’t believe that.’

‘And he does not thank you for helping him at your own expense. He doesn’t care what becomes of you. He thinks only of another woman.’

‘That makes no difference to me,’ said Pandora. ‘I did believe at first that he must be guilty—no, I didn’t! I don’t mean that. I was afraid other people might believe it—the evidence is so strong against him. But now I don’t think that horrible thing any longer. I’m happy, even here in this ghastly place, and I shall go on being happy if I never get out into God’s sunshine again! I’ll be happy because I know now who has done everything—worked the whole plot in this dreadful business. It is you—Monsieur Masquer!’

The man laughed. ‘Perhaps! In any case, why should I trouble to deny it to you? Is there

a reason why I should be afraid of you, Mademoiselle Spitfire ? ’

‘ Wait ! ’ said Pan. ‘ Isn’t there a proverb about the one who laughs last, laughing best ? I’m trying—fearfully hard—to remember your voice—your hands. I believe I do know you—anyhow, that I’ve met you before, somewhere. If I hadn’t, why should you wear a mask and disguise your voice by talking through your nose, and speaking French——’

‘ I will tell you why,’ broke in the Masquer. ‘ I do these things because, in case you take my advice and leave this place to go back into the world again, you might some day meet me and remember this—episode. That would be inconvenient for me, you understand. Now let us waste no more time in personalities, but decide whether you do go back to the world—or stay here.’

Pan’s heart was not beating so fast now. The very fact that the man in the mask was trying to frighten her steadied the girl’s nerves, and his melodramatic make-up even appealed to her sense of the ridiculous. She was ‘ in his power,’ it was true, as if she and he were the heroine and villain of a moving picture play, but it couldn’t do much harm and might do some good to show that she thought him a figure of fun.

‘ He’s perhaps bluffing me,’ she encouraged

herself. 'Well, I'll try bluffing him—and see what happens.'

Her first move in this game was to burst into a fit of giggling like a schoolgirl.

'Really I must beg your pardon for answering you like that!' she almost sobbed when she had got back her breath. 'It isn't hysterics. It's only—oh, if you knew how quaint you look in those clothes and with that black stuff over your face! Exactly like a respectable scarecrow in a potato field. They never have any faces, you know, and they always wear flappy hats and dug-out coats like yours. But there! I won't laugh any more. I'll listen to what you've got to say, and if you don't mind, I'll listen sitting down.' (Her knees trembled a little, though her voice was steady.)

Her impudence took the enemy by surprise. At the word 'scarecrow' he made a quick movement of anger, and Pan thought he would strike her; but after an instant's hesitation he changed his mind. 'I can make you regret your impertinence if I choose!' he exclaimed, still in French. Yet the girl guessed it was all he could do to control his voice.

'Of course,' she said in a different tone. 'You're master here. You can do whatever you choose—except control what I'm to do.'

'I have not told you yet what I wish you to

do,' Masquer reminded the girl, so amazed by her manner that mechanically he altered his own.

'You told me in your letter,' said Pan, seating herself in the more comfortable of the two old chairs.

'You disregarded my wishes—my advice—expressed in that letter. Your answer consisted of the one word, "No."'

'It did. And it will consist of the same old word again if your wishes are the same!'

'Perhaps not—when I explain to you what the consequences will be if you are obstinate.'

'I suppose you'll threaten to feed me to those beastly fishes with their bulgy eyes and nasty, receding profiles! You can't do worse than that, anyhow. And you may keep your threat, before I consent to ruin Rawdon Wells! I'll try hard to disagree with the disgusting creatures.'

'I make no "threats,"' the man retorted. 'I shall simply tell you what will happen.'

'Do!' said Pan. 'But while you're telling me things, won't you tell how you got me out of my cell and brought me here? Oh, and by the way, I should rather like to know where "here" is.'

'You shall have both those explanations, if you decide to be sensible,' was the reply.

'You seem to want everything for nothing!'

exclaimed Pan. 'Supposing, even, that I gave you a written statement of all I know about—my brother Captain Haste's wife—what guarantee would I have that you would set me free, unharmed? The way you are got up you look capable of tearing out my tongue and cutting off my fingers so I could neither speak nor write, once you'd finished with me—the way people kept their promises and freed their prisoners in the Middle Ages. You'd better be more diplomatic. Make a concession or two, to begin with, if you want to win my confidence. Tell me about the prison—and tell me where I am!'

'Very well, why not?' said the man. 'After all, to tell you what you ask can do no harm to me or any one—whatever becomes of you, Mademoiselle. The affair of—rescuing you from your cell was easy for me. I had the wardress and her policeman husband in my pocket. That made the letter business easy, too. And as for this place—can you not guess?'

'It's at Hidden Hall Court!' Pandora gasped on a sudden inspiration.

'Of course! Where else should it be? You are in the "hidden hall" itself.'

'But,' she stammered. 'Don—Sir Rawdon—told me once, when I asked if there were a hidden hall, that there was nothing hidden at all. It was only one of the family names in old days—'

“Hidden.” Surely, he ought to know. But if he had known, he wouldn’t have fibbed to me.’

‘Sir Rawdon ought to know, but the fact is that he doesn’t,’ said the Masquer. ‘The secret was lost to the family for many years—ever since the days of the last Hiddens, or the first Wells. It was the Hiddens who made the hall under the water—in the sixteenth century. In the eighteenth century the Wells’ came to the Court, and soon knowledge was lost of the play upon the old family name, which revealed yet guarded the secret: “Hidden Hall.” Every one had heard an old legend—but proof of the truth vanished. It has never been found again—till I found it—by accident.’

‘You?’ echoed the girl, so deeply interested that she forgot her load of trouble. ‘Are you an architect? I know Sir Rawdon has had architects down to look for secret rooms and passages. They did come on a concealed door and a stairway leading to the cellar, but nothing else I ever heard of—’

‘I am not an architect,’ the man broke in. ‘And if I had been, I should not have discovered the “hidden hall.” Because this place where we are now is not in the house. There are no mysterious spaces to be accounted for by an architect, not even under the house, though the entrance is from that cellar you spoke of.’

‘ Oh, then I know where it must be ! ’ Pan cut him short. ‘ Under the pool in the Persian Garden. That’s close to the house. One looks into it from the music-room and—the tapestry boudoir. Good gracious, how little I thought when I gazed out of the window into that green pool, trying to see the old carp they say lives in it, that some day I should be down under the water trying to look up ! ’

‘ That is where you are,’ the Masquer informed her. ‘ It is only through carelessness and lack of imagination that no one found the secret, through this last century and more, since the Hidden family died out and the first Rawdon Wells came. People had only to ask themselves, why was that concealed stairway made, leading to the west cellars, if there were not some secret reason for descending into the cellar ? Once, when Hidden Hall Court was let to me, I asked myself that question, and I set myself to find the answer. It was not long before I did find it. And so doing, I found this room where you are.’

‘ It’s a strange story ! ’ said Pan. ‘ And it’s strange they should call this room a “ hall.” It’s nothing of the sort. It’s just a small room.’

‘ The original hall under the pool has had partitions put into it, and several rooms made.’

‘ Ah ! ’ cried Pan. (This informed her of some-

thing she had been keen to know.) 'And was that done in the old days ?

'No doubt. I found it as it is.'

'And you never told Don—Sir Rawdon ?'

'Certainly not.'

'Then who made the bathroom next door to this ? That's not a hundred years old or anything like it, primitive as it looks !'

'I ordered the bathroom made,' said the Masquer. 'It is primitive, because I could employ only one workman, whom I trusted to keep the secret, and because it had to be done quickly, while the house was mine.'

'But,' the girl persisted, encouraged by his readiness to answer, 'what interest was it of yours to make a bathroom leading off a secret room in another man's house ?'

The Masquer laughed, as he had laughed before. 'It was of the greatest interest to make this place habitable, with a bath, and decent furnishing. I do not need to pay rent or ask Rawdon Wells for an invitation when I want to have bachelor quarters in his house.'

'You are more and more mysterious !' Pandora breathed. 'I do not know what to make of you at all. I know only one thing.'

'And that is ?'

'That you must have a confederate at the Court, as well as in the police station at Ardry-le-Marc.'

‘ You are a little too clever, Mademoiselle ! ’
he said. ‘ And after all, that is no affair of yours.
Now I have told you what you bargained to know,
we will go back to our business together.’

MRS. PAYNTOR—Eve Carroll's 'Aunt Jean'—was staying at the *Ritz* where she had given Eve her wedding breakfast. Though Eve's disappearance was to be kept a secret for the present, the news had been broken to Mrs. Payntor by Kennedy Haste. She was Eve's only near relative; she had chaperoned the girl since boarding-school days, and Ken felt that, hard though the blow would be, she must at once know all of the truth that was to be known.

To his surprise, the pretty, delicate little woman had taken it well. She encouraged Ken, who had dreaded his visit to the *Ritz* with a sickening dread. She would not believe that anything horrible had happened to Eve. 'No one would have the heart to hurt her,' she said. 'Eve's too pretty and charming. Even if a man meant to kill the child as some hideous sort of vengeance, when the minute came I'm sure he couldn't. It certainly looks as if Rawdon Wells must be responsible for the thing, whatever the thing is. But

it will turn out to be a case of kidnapping—no worse. You see, Don was wildly in love and thought she cared—had a right to think so, I'm afraid. And the shock of being jilted for his best friend—that is, the best after his cousin—may have turned his brain.'

Had Dagon not been informed on the way to town, that this interview between Ken and Aunt Jean was to take place, he would not have dared present himself at the *Ritz*. As it was, he telephoned there, and reminding Mrs. Payntor of their acquaintance in the past, told her that he was on the Hidden Hall Court case for Scotland Yard. Might he call, and ask her a few questions?

The pleasant Southern drawl which he remembered, answered through the 'phone, and gave willing permission. Ten minutes later Dagon was springing out of a taxi at the door of the *Ritz*.

'The Pearl Man!' exclaimed Mrs. Payntor, greeting him in her private sitting-room full of wonderful roses. 'You know that's what I used to call you—though it should have been "boy" instead of "man"—and you don't look much older now. But what a strange coincidence that you should be working again for our family, here in England—trying to find my niece.'

'It seems stranger than it is,' the detective said. 'I took up the case partly because it concerned Miss Carroll; partly, too, because I happened

to know that Sir Rawdon Wells was half Italian. I'm supposed to be an Italian.'

'Oh, indeed!' exclaimed Mrs. Payntor; and Dagon, whose gipsy eyes never missed anything, noticed that she coloured deeply under a thick though quite artistic layer of rouge and powder. 'I am—very interested in Italians myself.' As she spoke, she glanced involuntarily towards the piano on whose embroidered Chinese cover stood many silver-framed photographs. There was one of Eve, and one of Kennedy Haste; others of officers, English, American and French; but the only Italian whom Dagon could see there was Paolo Magnani. There were three portraits of him, all taken in different rôles in which he had appeared as a screen star.

'I think,' the pretty little woman went on rather nervously, 'that Italians are the most romantic, picturesque people on earth, and I just adore them. You do look rather Italian, I see, now you speak of it! But you are simply the image of Captain Haste's adopted sister. Have you met her yet?'

'Not yet,' Dagon answered. By this time he was seated on a chair opposite Mrs. Payntor's sofa; and he realized with a certain brisk enlightenment how much she had changed since the time when his services had helped to restore her lost pearls. She had been a good-looking, middle-aged

woman then. Dagon had taken her for forty-six. Five years had passed, and she was ten years younger—or it wasn't her fault if she was not! In those days she had been innocent of make-up, and her neat hair had been frankly fading. Now she had the pink and white complexion of a girl; her eyebrows and lashes were as dark as Eve's; she had quantities of 'marcelled' golden hair; and her dress was suited to the part of a 'siren' on the stage.

She was in love with a man younger than herself, of course. That was one of the things Dagon had come to find out, and he had found it out almost at first glance. He thought that he had already 'spotted' the man, too, but he would soon be sure. And he hoped to turn several other conjectures into certainties as well.

'So I am like Miss Haste!' he said.

'Oh, astonishingly! You might be brother and sister.'

'Maybe we are!' (He pretended to laugh at this jest.) 'I hear she was a foundling. So was I—a self-made foundling! I hope to see Miss Haste. Did the Captain tell you how she'd disappeared!'

'Yes, she must have escaped, clever little creature! She's not guilty! The idea is ridiculous.'

'So I think.'

'Not that I'm fond of the girl. I could have

been, for she's fascinating—so odd and gipsy-like. But she couldn't bear Eve. Naturally I resented that, though I always behaved nicely to the child. I used to be quite sorry for her, too. She was sick with jealousy !'

' On account of her brother ? '

' Well, I suppose she wanted to give that impression. She must have known that she showed her feelings towards Eve now and then, so she hoped people would believe it was on account of her brother. My private opinion, however, Mr. Dagon, is that she was dead in love with Rawdon Wells. Very likely he'd have cared for her if he hadn't met Eve. He'd known Pandora and made a great pet of her since she was a child. Used to give her presents and flowers, take her motoring, and all that, I've been told, especially after he was invalided out of the war in 1915, while her brother was away. But I should say she was—is, I mean !—a proud and honourable little thing. She wouldn't have hurt Eve for the world. How quixotic that she should try to sacrifice herself to save Don Wells from suspicion. I don't imagine he appreciates it.'

' I think he will, some day,' said Dagon, who fully intended that Wells should do so. ' By the by, that's a good picture of Captain Haste you have on the piano, and a beautiful one of his wife. May I ask who is this very handsome young man,

rather like Sir Rawdon Wells, but better looking ? ’

‘ Oh, that ! What a wonder you don’t recognize his face, Mr. Dagon,’ exclaimed Mrs. Payntor, jumping up and flitting—if a plump woman can flit—to the piano. ‘ He’s one of the most popular cinema actors in the world, Paolo Magnani, Rawdon Wells’ first cousin. That’s why they’re alike. Their mothers were sisters. Paolo is a great friend of—of Eve’s and mine. We admire him immensely, and he likes us.’ (She was all smiles and blushes.)

‘ He is certainly very handsome indeed. There couldn’t be a finer looking man,’ said Dagon, gazing at the three portraits.

Mrs. Payntor beamed on him. ‘ That’s absolutely true ! ’ she agreed rapturously. ‘ And he’s as charming as he looks. You know, there’s a great romance about Paolo Magnani. He might have been in Rawdon Wells’ place, with those splendid estates and all that fortune, instead of depending on his own work for money.’

‘ Indeed ! I didn’t know. Do tell me the story,’ Dagon encouraged her.

The lady was delighted with the invitation. Evidently it was delicious to her to talk of Paolo Magnani.

‘ Yes,’ she explained. ‘ The sisters were twins. It was Paolo’s mother (of course, she wasn’t married, and so he was not born then) with whom Sir Raw-

don Wells fell in love—in Naples, I think. She was a singer—wonderful voice. By the way, Paolo inherited it—but alas, lost it after an attack of diphtheria, otherwise he would now perhaps be the leading tenor of the world instead of a moving picture actor. But we were speaking of the mother. She and Rawdon Senior were going to be married when the twin sister—a dancer—came home to Naples to dance at San Carlo in the famous ballet they have there. She was even more beautiful and fascinating than the sister, and either she was very unscrupulous or else she fell madly in love with the Englishman. Anyhow, he lost his head completely. The two ran away together and were married, leaving the other twin *plantée là*, as you might say. She was so wild with rage and humiliation that she married a tenor in the same opera company who'd been hopelessly in love with her before the Englishman came along. He was a very poor match—shiftless and without much talent. They led a cat and dog life. That was the history of poor Paolo's childhood. What a sweet nature he must have had not to be embittered, and to be as devoted to his English cousin as he is, instead of brooding over what might have been.'

'Yes, fine of him!' agreed Dagon.

'Paolo has often told us about his wretched childhood, poor and neglected by his parents.

He's quite frank—not a snobbish bone in his body ! He isn't sure that his father wasn't actually mixed up with the Camorra—that terrible secret society in Naples which does every sort of crime, and sends the “Black Hand” to America.’

‘You are right, Mrs. Payntor, it's mighty romantic,’ said the detective, delighted with the way that things were going. ‘It would make a scenario plot for one of Mr. Magnani's screen plays.’

‘Wouldn't it ? And all that came after ?’

‘What did come after ?’ Dagon asked innocently. ‘I don't quite know.’

‘Well, Paolo used to sing in Italian cafés, and weird places like that, to get money for his training. When he'd saved up something he began to study for the operatic stage, and had glorious prospects, with his looks and voice. But then he got ill, as I told you. His voice was injured. The poor fellow was in despair, and thought of killing himself ; but just then—and that was like a play, where everything happens at exactly the right time !—his cousin, Rawdon Wells, came to Italy on purpose to look him up. He—Don Wells—had finished his course at Oxford and was free to travel. He'd always wanted to find Paolo since his mother—when she was dying, I fancy—told him the trick she'd played on her sister Francesca. Paolo and he were about the same

age. Don insisted upon settling an allowance on his cousin, and invited him to come to England. They took a trip together to New York, too; and that's where Paolo got his first start in the moving pictures. What a pity we didn't meet them then! But we were in the south, and Eve was still a child.'

'What an interesting story!' Dagon flattered the little lady. 'I'm quite thrilled. Truth is stranger than fiction. Mr. Magnani must have made a fortune for himself as an actor.'

'Not a fortune, I'm afraid,' sighed Mrs. Payntor. 'I expect poor Paolo is rather generous and extravagant. Why, for example, he's away now, doing a picture in a wild part of Skye—has been there since Eve's wedding day—started directly after—but look at these lovely roses, my favourites! He has ordered three dozen to come to me every day. I hate to have him spend the money, they're so expensive now! But what can I do?'

'What, indeed?' laughed Dagon. 'Well, that settles one question for me, which I meant to ask you.'

'What question?' she inquired curiously.

'You won't think me impudent if I tell you?'

'Of course not! We're old friends. You did me a great favour once. Ask any question you like.'

'I don't need to ask it now. I was wondering

—in my detective metier, you know—if Mr. Magnani had been one of Miss Carroll's admirers before her marriage. But a man isn't in love with one woman, and sending such flowers every day to another !'

'Oh, do you think that?' breathed Mrs. Payntor in ecstasy. 'Well, I used to fancy he liked Eve. He came often with Don, when Don's affair with her was in full blast. And he sometimes looked at her as if—but then, most men looked at Eve. I never saw a girl more attractive to men. I had an idea it was that wonderful perfume of hers that added to her fascination. She never would tell even me what it was made of. But—well—I tried to console Paolo when I thought he was feeling down on his luck. And—anyhow, he has seemed grateful.'

Dagon thought hard for a minute. Eve was much richer as well as much younger and prettier than her Aunt Jean ; still, Mrs. Payntor wouldn't make a bad 'second fiddle.'

She was hurrying on, however, with her history of Paolo, as though she had read the detective's mind.

'If Rawdon died unmarried—or even now, if Eve doesn't come back, and he never marries, Paolo will be a very rich man, so he doesn't need to be a fortune hunter,' she said. 'Rawdon has made a will leaving everything, even Hidden Hall

Court, to Paolo if he himself dies a bachelor (he can leave the Court as he likes, you see, because he's absolutely the last of his line). And if he has no heir of his own, it's really quite fair he should wish to make up to Paolo for the past.'

'Oh, quite, quite!' murmured Dagon. 'And where do you say Mr. Magnani has been since the day of the wedding?'

'In Skye.'

'You are quite certain he's been there ever since, and is there still?'

'Entirely certain,' said Mrs. Payntor, with modest triumph, 'because he wires me every day without fail.'

Dagon did not answer. This reply of hers had been a blow to his theory. It was tottering. It might have to fall.

THAT same night Dagon went back to Essex with Haste, and was given quarters at the Court. Every one there knew that he was a detective, but he had a way of ingratiating himself with each member of the household, no matter how humble, making him or her believe that every one else was under suspicion.

His mission being frank and above board, he could go where he pleased, do what he pleased, and ask what questions he pleased without arousing resentment.

There were few old servants indoors at the Court, since Mrs. Jenkins, the late housekeeper, had been obliged to leave, and Davis, the butler, had been replaced by Marianti. None of the new ones had seen much, if anything, of Pandora Haste; but Mrs. Gillett and her daughter both remarked the likeness between the girl and the detective.

It was Fanny (requested by Sergeant Anson to stay on at the Court for a few days) who spoke of it to her mother the first time Dagon appeared,

on an invented errand, at the door of the house-keeper's room.

'Good gracious!' the girl exclaimed, as he announced himself. 'You gave me such a start! I almost thought you were Miss Haste disguised as a boy—a man. Did you ever see such a resemblance, mother?'

Mrs. Gillett was chalk pale, but perhaps no paler than when Dagon had interviewed her on the morning of his arrival. He had thought then that she looked like a dead woman galvanized into seeming life. Yet she had, at that time, said nothing about a resemblance, nor had her daughter. The detective was not surprised, however, at the omission on the first occasion, nor by Fanny Gillett's exclamation now. When he came first to Hidden Hall Court his upper lip had been adorned by a small moustache, and he wore his dark hair brushed back from his forehead in the approved style of British youth. His aim had been to look as much of a man and as conventional as possible. But since he had seen Pandora Haste's photograph, he had been doing all he could to accentuate and call attention to the likeness. In London he had shaved off the dark shadow which did duty as a moustache, and he now had his naturally waved hair parted in the middle, a fashion which made him look younger, more boyish—almost girlish. To add to this effect, he had on a blue serge suit with

a silk shirt, and soft rolling collar turned over a tie done in a sailor knot.

No one who had ever known Pandora Haste at all well could mistake the resemblance now, or say vaguely, 'Who is it you are like?'

'I—I've hardly seen Miss Haste,' Mrs. Gillett stammered. 'It was only—on that awful night when she scolded me—oh, quite rightly!—because I couldn't keep calm. I had other things to think of than her face then, I assure you, Fanny. Still—now you recall her—I remember her large eyes—her short hair. Yes, I suppose there is a resemblance. But, of course, there is nothing strange in it. We see striking resemblances every day. You are an American, are you not, Mr. Dagon?'

'To tell the truth, Mrs. Gillett, I don't know what I am,' the young man answered, resting his elbows on the table and with his face between his hands, looking across at her.

They were all three in the housekeeper's sitting-room, Mrs. Gillett darning some beautiful old linen, and Fanny with a book of love-poems in her lap. Dagon had consciously thrown out all his power of magnetism to win them both, and felt that he had captured their somewhat reluctant interest. 'Like Miss Haste (the Captain told me her story), I'm a foundling. So there's another likeness between us. One of the first things I remember is wandering

about a street alone, crying because I was hungry and deserted—a very small kid of three or four years old. It seems that it was a street in the Canadian town of Halifax, and that I could speak only Italian.'

As he talked, Dagon kept his big eyes on Mrs. Gillett's face. She was looking at him when he began. Then, after a quick dilation of her pupils, the lids dropped. She turned away, so that he saw her face only in profile. It was bent over her work. But she was not working. Dagon noticed that her hands trembled.

'I had a funny little red waistcoat on, which I have kept to this day,' the detective added. 'And the queer part about that is a dream I have sometimes. I see myself with a beautiful woman in a garden which must be Italian. And she is carrying a baby in a red cloak. I often wonder if the dream is a remembrance of something real.'

Mrs. Gillett dropped her ~~thimble~~ ^{thimble}, which rolled across the floor. Mechanically Dagon sprang to pick it up. Fanny got to her feet also, and the detective allowed the young woman to reach the thimble before him. She gave it back to Mrs. Gillett, and Dagon saw that she looked at her mother in surprise.

He felt a strong sense of elation. He had meant to make this test, but had hoped little from it. Remarkable, even mysterious as Mrs. Gillett

seemed in the situation of housekeeper, he had not expected her to know anything of Pandora Haste's past—his own past, surely linked with that of the girl. Yet his stray arrow had hit the bull's-eye! This woman did know something—everything perhaps! She was alarmed or conscience-stricken, well-nigh overwhelmed.

The detective realized that at this moment he had her at his mercy. If he chose to spring his discovery upon the woman she might be frightened into telling some part of what she knew! But he would not be satisfied with part. He wanted all. So he must wait.

Now, if she chose to hold back important information he could not prove that she had it. Armed with what he guessed, he must learn more, to gain a hold upon her. As for Fanny, the look of surprise he had caught made him think that she did not know the secret of her mother's alarm. She wondered what it meant, and was dying for him—Dagon—to go, so that she might ask questions.

'She won't get the right answers, though,' he thought. 'I begin to believe both those women are in the pay of my "Unknown." They're in this house for a special purpose, the young one and the old. But this secret belongs to the mother alone. If she wanted her daughter to know, she'd have told long ago. She won't tell now. The girl

might betray her to Haste. She'd do anything to please him.'

If the detective had hoped that Fanny could wheedle anything from her mother, he might have given her the chance she wanted, and played eaves-dropper. But, believing there was little to gain thus, he lingered on.

'You're both kind enough to say you'd gladly help in my researches,' he said, when the thimble had been returned. 'This is a baffling case! The most difficult job I ever tackled. So I hope you won't mind, Mrs. Gillett, explaining what you meant about "seeing ghosts" in this house?'

The pale woman made a desperate effort at self-control. 'Seeing ghosts?' she stammered. 'I don't—remember saying—any such thing to you.'

'It wasn't to me,' Dagon volunteered. 'Some one—I forget who—mentioned hearing you, the night of Mrs. Haste's disappearance. It was in the music-room or the tapestry boudoir. I wanted to ask when I met you first, but you seemed so nervous I waited. You're all right again now, or I wouldn't upset you.'

She looked faintly relieved, as if glad that he supposed her to be 'all right.'

'I don't know what I said then,' she replied. 'I was so horrified by the blood and—and everything.'

'What I was told was like this,' Dagon per-

sisted. 'That ghosts had appeared to you here at the Court. That you believed in the haunting of the tapestry boudoir. That you hadn't wanted the Hastes to spend their honeymoon in the house because of warnings you'd had—and of what you'd seen.'

'If I said that I must have been hysterical,' cried Mrs. Gillett. 'Though I confess, I do believe in apparitions on a scene where a crime has taken place.'

'Oh, you think a crime has taken place at the Court?'

'Probably many crimes, the place is so old.'

'Had you any one particular crime in your mind?'

She looked hunted, but was driven to answer, 'The bride who disappeared.'

'You don't mean Mrs. Haste?'

'Oh, no! The bride in the eighteenth century, about the time they lost knowledge of the secret rooms—if there are any. She was the first Lady Wells at Hidden Hall Court.'

'And an Italian?'

'Yes; I've heard so.'

'Strange how many Italians have helped to make history for this old place!'

Mrs. Gillett looked up, a flush on her cheekbones, but Dagon's face was expressionless, and she made no answer. Instead, she bent intently over her

work. The detective watched her for a moment, then flung a double question at her head: 'And Mr. Paolo Magnani—you know him? He comes here often?'

The eyes of the mother and daughter met. It was the younger woman who replied: 'I know Mr. Magnani. Mother doesn't. She's lived here only a short time, and he's been too busy with a picture his company's making to visit his cousin. I met him while I was nursing Captain Haste. And he was at the wedding. What brought Mr. Magnani to your mind? Well, he can't be mixed up in the disappearance anyhow!' cried the V.A.D. 'He told me at the wedding reception that he was leaving at once for Skye. There was something in the paper next day, too, about his going. So you can't suspect him of having a hand in the business?'

'Why should he have?' Dagon shrugged. 'He wasn't in love with Miss Carroll, was he?'

'Certainly not!' snapped Fanny. 'If he ever did admire her, he changed his mind. I wouldn't be surprised if he married the aunt, she's got pots of money.'

'And she'd have more if Mrs. Haste died and left her something,' the Canadian remarked. 'What did Mr. Magnani do in the war?'

'He was exempted, on account of a weak heart,' said Fanny.

‘It’s an ill heart that does no one good,’ garbled Dagon. ‘Was he in his own country or England while the war was on?’

‘Mostly in England, acting, I believe, but England is his own country now. Mr. Magnani has been naturalized as an Englishman. Living here so much, it gives him advantages, I suppose.’

Dagon agreed. He had got all he could hope to get in one interview from the mother and daughter, and it seemed from what he heard on all sides that no theory which included Magnani in the list of suspects would hold water. A man couldn’t be doing moving picture ‘stunts’ in Skye, and murdering or kidnapping girls at the same time!

Apparently the cinema star was innocent and Dagon must look farther for his ‘Unknown.’ Yet he was not satisfied with that conclusion.

Of course, it might be a coincidence, but it was odd that nearly all the old servants had gone about the same time. It was easy to account for the footmen. They had ‘joined up,’ and women had taken their places. Lately, new footmen had been obtained. The cook had received a legacy and ‘given up’ service. Mrs. Gillett, in becoming housekeeper, had swept away housemaids like cobwebs, and imported protégées of her own. Davis, the butler, had left suddenly, and Marianti had been found through the recommendation of Magnani.

Though Rawdon Wells had been 'smashed up' in the autumn of 1915, he had done war work of some kind and had spent much time in London. It was then that his 'palship' with Pandora Haste had been cemented, and the girl had perhaps imagined him in love with her—till Eve appeared on the scene. So it happened that no one could tell much about what went on at Hidden Hall Court in the years of the war.

Dagon had tried the gardeners, asking if the place had been lent or let, and whether—as it was so picturesque—moving pictures of it had been taken—say, by the company of which Mr. Magnani was a star. But the men who had been on the spot through the war-years were old, and discreet, or forgetful. The detective found his thoughts turning towards Davis, the late butler. Where was Davis? How could he be got at?

THE Masquer's 'business' was to strike a bargain with Pandora Haste. She was to tell him all she knew about Rawdon Wells and Eve Carroll, including the evidence which might connect Rawdon with Eve's disappearance. Pan was also formally to take back in writing her confession of guilt. She was to state on oath that she had made this confession in the hope of saving Wells, but that, on second thoughts, she found it impossible to continue her perjury. She was to add that she had escaped from the police station through the connivance of a friend, and that she intended to keep out of the way until the trial of Sir Rawdon was over. This to avoid being called upon as a witness.

In return for writing such a letter, Pan would be released by the Masquer from her prison under the pool, and placed in a comfortable, commonplace farmhouse, where the only restraint would be her own word of honour. Later, she would be freed.

If she refused to comply with these terms, she would be kept where she was for an indefinite

length of time. Her obstinacy would benefit no one, as in prison she could not again testify in favour of Wells, and her escape from the police station at Ardry-le-Mare would be taken to mean that she had lied and was afraid of being found out. Besides, the Masquer hinted, the time might come when it would be inconvenient to retain her in her present quarters. It would, however, be still more inconvenient to set her free if she were an avowed enemy. As to the alternative, she might draw her own conclusions.

‘ I have said that I would not harm you “ except under great provocation,” ’ the man reminded the girl. ‘ But—if you insist on giving me great provocation—you know the saying, “ Safety first ! ” I might be obliged to rid myself of a menace.’

‘ Meaning me ? ’ Pandora asked.

‘ Meaning you.’

‘ How would you do it ? ’ she catechized him. ‘ If you let the water in here, you’d spoil all the nice tapestries and valuable old furniture. As you keep the place for your bachelor quarters, that wouldn’t suit you, would it ? ’

‘ Such means would not be necessary. The Hidden family who designed and made this secret place, didn’t lose sight of the need for suppressing a prisoner occasionally. They knew how to utilize the water, without letting it damage their property.’

This hint chilled Pandora's spine more icily than if the man had described the plan for eliminating superfluous persons. Her imagination supplied the details. She could see herself, bound and gagged, shot up into the deep green water of the pool, as men were sometimes shot through the conning-tower of a submerged submarine. Long years afterwards when Ken and Rawdon Wells were old her skeleton might be found, when she herself had been almost forgotten. Perhaps the skeleton of the lost bride of the legend was there now, and for generations the fish had glided back and forth among the ribs of that once beautiful body!

Pan had always hated the thought of drowning. Still, she would not give up. 'No, I won't write the confession,' she said. 'I've made one already, and I don't want to alter it in any way. I've told you that nothing you can say or do will induce me to change my mind, and I tell you the same again. So you may as well save your breath.'

She saw the man quiver with rage, and clench his fists. But she could have laughed—a dreary laugh—because she saw also that he was at a loss how best to deal with such obstinacy. He was furious, and would thoroughly enjoy breaking her head against the brick wall as a punishment, but to do that would be like killing the goose that laid

the golden eggs. If she were dead, she would be worse than useless. But living, there was always hope that sooner or later she might yield.

When threats and arguments had availed no more than a shower of pebbles against a stone wall, Masquer gave up for the day.

‘We shall see,’ he said, ‘what a little starvation will do—“a blockade!” That’s considered an effective measure in war, and it is war between us now. You’ve eaten some of your food, I see, and there’s more left. But it won’t last long, eke it out as you may. I give you two days to come to heel! At the end of that time I will visit you again. Till then—au revoir!’

As the man backed to the door behind the tapestry Pan made a dash—not to escape; she knew that was impossible—but to succeed where she’d failed before, and snatch a glimpse of what lay beyond. He pushed her back once more, yet she did see what she took to be a narrow passage, and on the opposite side another door. The girl stumbled on to the bed, as the Masquer threw her off, and the key had turned in the lock before she had got to her feet again. But at least she had something to think of besides the man’s threats!

She thought of that door across the narrow passage; and before her mind’s eye she hastily sketched

a plan of the reconstructed 'Hidden Hall,' as she now imagined it.

'It's very simple,' Pan told herself. 'For some reason they wanted separate rooms down here, so they made two small ones of this size by running up walls and making a passage just wide enough for a man to squeeze through. Now I know where the voice that followed the echo came from! Somebody is in a room across the corridor, and when I yelled the person there yelled back. Then the Masquer made a noise coming down, and everything had to stop.'

Masquer might have gone to pay a visit to that opposite room, but Pan thought not. Her ears were sharp, and she would have heard his key in the other lock.

Perhaps he was lurking outside, to listen in case she cried for mercy—begged to be taken out at any price rather than be left alone for two whole days without food! Well, she wasn't going to cry for mercy. She would wait for a few minutes until—if he were out there—he'd lose patience and depart. Then she would try for the echo again. But meanwhile, who was Masquer? The girl racked her brains in a desperate effort to guess the mystery of the man.

The disguised voice was so well disguised that, if she'd heard it before, she could associate it with no one she had ever met. The figure, with its

queer stoop, was rendered unrecognizable by that and the cloak. What with the big, soft hat and the melodramatic mask of crape, the man might have been an apparition without face or head!

Though Pan had no idea of time save for the faint daylight, her eyes were by now well accustomed to the green glimmer, and she peered anxiously through the dusk which, it seemed to her, was deepening towards night.

'Is it five or ten minutes since the brute went out and locked the door?' she asked herself. 'Anyhow, when I've counted sixty I'll pound on the wall and call out again.'

But she had not got to thirty-five when the silence broke. There came a muffled knocking, which sounded far away. But there was no mistake. A knocking it was!

Pandora ran to the locked door behind the tapestry, and somehow her hand, grasping the curtain, brushed against a small protuberance on the wall which she had missed before.

She forgot her counting. For an instant she forgot even the knocks. 'An electric light switch!' she gasped, and pressed the tiny knob.

Instantly the room was not flooded, but bathed with a brighter light than that of the fading day. It was green also, and therefore must filter through green glass, since it was not coloured by the water. At first, she could not see whence this light came,

but looking up she spied four small green globes, one in each corner where wall and thick glass ceiling met. At best, it was not much brighter than forest twilight, with sunset drifting through an emerald roof of leaves. No doubt Masquer made this improvement for his own sake, but had feared a bright light lest it should shine up through the pool in the Persian Garden. He would have calculated just the safe amount, when he had the work done by that 'one workman whom he could trust.' Well, it would spare her the horror of black darkness through the long nights!

'Who are you?' she called.

The voice behind the echo answered, but Pan could catch no words.

'Good gracious, if it's Eve Carroll?' the girl gasped, half aloud. 'Oh, it must, it must be Eve! Rawdon Wells had not killed her. At worst he had shut her up. But, surely, he had not done even that! He had done nothing to Eve. He was wholly innocent. The Masquer was the guilty one.'

Pan had not liked Eve. The girl was frankly aware that she'd been jealous. She had never tried to excuse herself. It had almost broken her heart when Don fell in love with Miss Carroll. In her despair she thought it quite broken, and that life was over! But she hadn't hated Eve then. She had only been sad. It was when Eve threw

away the love for which she—Pan—would have given half her youth, that the girl had felt actual hatred.

In those days—the days when Eve and Kennedy Haste were first engaged, Pandora would have been glad had she heard that Eve Carroll was dead. Yet she had not been quite so desperately miserable as when Don had been Eve's lover. Something of the old 'palship' between her and Rawdon Wells had been saved from the wreck of his happiness. At first he had said nothing about the blow that had fallen on him. He had seemed glad to have Pan with him, though he had forgotten her while the sunshine of Eve's favour had shone upon him. Then, one day—not long before the wedding, his anguish had burst forth in a torrent of words. He had not meant them, of course, and Pan had tried to put them out of her mind. But there had come a time when she couldn't help remembering. Even then it was Eve she blamed—Eve who would be responsible for everything, no matter what happened. Now, however, when she thought that Eve was a prisoner like herself in this secret place under the pool, Pan's heart warmed faintly towards the other girl.

'Eve!—Eve!' she called, and beat upon the door.

There was an answer, but again the voice was muffled by distance.

‘ I wonder if she understands telegraphy ! ’ Pandora thought. She herself had learned it during the war, when she had wished to qualify as an air-woman. She had not practised much, for Ken had written from France and begged her to give up the plan ; but she remembered the letters of the alphabet in the Morse code.

Now she snatched off her little brown *suède* shoe, and began to rap out with its heel the name of ‘ Eve Carroll.’ To that she added, ‘ Do you understand ? ’

There was silence as she tapped, and the instant she stopped, knocking began again. But it was not in code. It had no meaning, she was sure ; and regretfully the hope of exchanging messages had to be given up.

‘ How terrible ! ’ the girl groaned. ‘ Think of Ken agonizing about her, almost mad with grief. Think of Don accused of murdering her ! Think of that masked beast scattering blood and finger-prints about, and burning skeletons to fix the guilt on Don and get him hanged, while here she is all the while ! ’

It seemed to Pandora that she must do something for the two men she loved. She had done her best, but she must do more. If Eve were imprisoned here, the Masquer would not let her go free until Don was ruined or dead—perhaps for his own protection not even then. She and the girl she had

hated—but did not hate now—would be got rid of, unless—unless she could think of some way out.

Was there a way ?

WITH all Dagon's keenness and diplomacy, he failed to learn what had become of the late butler at Hidden Hall Court.

Barring Marianti, who had taken Davis' place (Marianti, Dagon did not care to ask), there was nobody likely to know the man's address, unless one of the two old servants who remained: the head-gardener and a lodge-keeper. Making friends with these, the detective learned without direct inquiries that neither had any knowledge of Davis' private life. He was a 'queer chap,' liked by none, though perfection as a butler. He had 'kept himself to himself,' and on leaving the Court had not mentioned where he was going.

Dagon had no better luck in the small village a mile away, where he tried the post office and the inn, and the town of Ardry-le-Mare was too far off to offer much hope. The more difficult became the game, however, the more firmly Dagon determined to play it to the end; and by telephoning Scotland Yard he arranged for an advertisement to appear next morning in all the most important

London papers. A firm of solicitors asked for news of Samuel Davis (the Christian name was recalled by the local postmaster), late butler at Hidden Hall Court, Essex, who would, by applying immediately to them, learn something to his financial advantage.

That would tempt Davis out of his hole, thought Dagon. And it did, the result of the 'ad.' bringing with it an electric shock of surprise. Samuel Davis wired to Messrs. Topham from Portree, Skye!

He was there, he telegraphed, visiting a relative, and being confined to his room with gout could not at present undertake the journey to London. He would, however, be glad to hear at once what was the object of the advertisement. Had money been left him, and if so, how much?

Dagon had arranged that a colleague should go to Skye and try to catch sight of Paolo Magnani on one of his moving picture excursions. Davis being at Portree, the two birds could be killed with one stone—if it were aimed by a sure hand. The Canadian would have liked that hand to be his own; but he could not leave Hidden Hall Court just then.

The ex-butler gave as his address 'Post Office, Portree,' but Dagon's substitute, John Murdoch, had only to show his credentials to the postmaster of that town to clear his way of all difficulty in the matter of identification. A wire to Davis warned

him to expect a 'letter containing particulars,' and such a letter was dispatched at the same time with the telegram. It contained a cheque for five pounds, signed by 'John Topham,' and informed Mr. S. Davis that it came from an anonymous friend, grateful for a past kindness, which he perhaps had forgotten. It said also that a further sum would be handed over, at a personal meeting, when Mr. Davis could keep an appointment in London.

Murdoch was invited to sit in the postmaster's room, and when 'A letter for Samuel Davis' was inquired for, he was promptly told. This gave him time to slip out into the public office and see the legal-looking envelope delivered—after a slight delay—to a respectably dressed old man. He had little doubt from the description given him that it was Davis himself, in spite of that 'attack of gout,' which confined him to the house!

This person could not control his impatience till he got outside, but halted in the middle of the post office to open the letter. Murdoch had time, therefore, while pretending to write out a telegram, for a thorough inspection of the squat and elderly form.

The man was a curious mixture of two types, neither agreeable: frog and fox. He had the figure, short neck and thrust-up chin of a frog, and the sly, slant black eyes, pointed nose, and square,

whiskered jaws of an old dog-fox. He read the letter eagerly, though with a puzzled air, sneered at the five-pound cheque, and finally stuffed envelope and all into his pocket. He walked to the shelf where telegraph forms and pencils were displayed, but changed his mind, and with a shrug of the shoulders marched out of the office.

At a safe distance Murdoch followed, and after a walk of nearly a mile saw Davis go into a small but pretty house beyond the limits of the town. It did not look in the least like a house where an ex-butler would stay, visiting a relative!

In Portree again, Murdoch went to an estate agent, described the house, said he had taken a fancy to it, and asked if it might be sold or let. As a matter of fact, said the agent, the place was generally let furnished during the summer. This season the usual tenants had been unable to come, and Mr. Magnani, the cinema star, had taken the house for a few weeks only, at a high rent. The agent understood that the actor was ill, however, and his part was being played by an understudy. This was a blow to the girls of Portree, who had been thrilled at the prospect of seeing their favourite screen hero in real life.

The discovery that Davis was an inmate of Mr. Magnani's house, probably a servant there, interested Murdoch. Besides, the fact that those two were under the same roof would save him time and

trouble. He had been ordered to learn all he could concerning the movements of Magnani, as well as to 'get at' Davis, and he knew it was a connexion between the two (if any) that Dagon wished to trace. This connexion at least was now proved at the start! And Murdoch concocted a telegram to Dagon in a code used officially by Scotland Yard.

The answer came early next morning. 'At any price get into that house and see Magnani. Imperative.'

Murdoch whistled as he read this order. He had heard since wiring Dagon that Magnani was seriously ill, and could not see even the manager of his own company. A doctor from off the island was with the actor, and nobody else was let in.

It was all very well to say 'Imperative' in the telegram. There was a still stronger word in the English language—'Impossible.'

Still, Murdoch meant to try.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, the London architect sent for by Kennedy Haste had come to the Court with an assistant, and together the two had made strenuous efforts to get at the heart of the secret. But, according to their report, the secret seemed to have no 'heart'! Nothing could be discovered that had not been discovered already; the hidden door in the tapestry boudoir, and the concealed staircase behind this door, which led to the cellar, and

had there an equally well-concealed exit behind a stone pillar—apparently solid, moving outward in a groove.

It was admittedly odd that so much trouble should have been taken to make a secret way down into this cellar, which was connected by archways with two newer cellars under wings of the house. Logically, the hidden staircase should have led to something important which might need to be reached secretly and in haste ; but no measurings or conjecturings brought to light that ‘ something important.’ The architect, accordingly, gave it as his opinion that nothing of the sort existed. There might have been a plan, he suggested, which was never carried out. If so, the stairway with its hidden doors at top and bottom, would be satisfactorily accounted for.

With this opinion—which was that of a great expert, and made after exhaustive research—Haste had to be satisfied. But Dagon had one of his ‘ hunches ’ that for once the architect was wrong. He felt that he was going to find out something at Hidden Hall Court—something, perhaps, which would make the whole mystery clear. And for Dagon the ‘ whole mystery ’ did not begin on the night of the Haste wedding. To find the real beginning—which might account for much of the rest—he believed that he must go back a good many years.

In the hope of getting at that beginning, he had 'made friends' with Sir Rawdon Wells, and had convinced himself that, innocent or not in the case of Eve Carroll, Wells was unaware of any further secret in the construction of the house. If Mrs. Haste were a prisoner in some 'hidden hall,' Rawdon Wells had not put her there. As for Pandora, Wells had no motive for hiding the girl. She asserted that she had 'done away with Eve,' and if Sir Rawdon could be cleared she was the one to clear him. No, it was a very different person who needed to suppress Miss Haste; and Dagon clung to his belief that this person was responsible for both disappearances.

His clues were few, and (excepting the skeleton which was that of a man, thus indicating a plot against Wells) not satisfactory. His conclusions were based on ideas, rather than proofs, and if he had been forced by his superiors at Scotland Yard to lay his cards face uppermost upon the table, he might not have received support on the lines he had laid down for himself. Fortunately for him, however, he had done amazingly brilliant work, and was called behind his back the 'Infant Prodigy.' When he begged to be trusted without questions for a few days, he was thus trusted; and it was due to his earnest request that Rawdon Wells was not arrested on suspicion, despite the favourable evidence of the skeleton.

This being the state of affairs, Dagon knew that he must soon 'make good' in some way, and justify himself; otherwise—as he put it mentally—for every one concerned 'the fat was in the fire.' Besides, it would be impossible to keep the secret of Mrs. Haste's and Pandora's disappearance from the public much longer. All the servants at Hidden Hall Court were pledged to silence, but some one was sure to talk, or Mrs. Payntor would confide her anxiety to a friend, and there would be a newspaper sensation in England and America. This would be terrible for Captain Haste, whom Dagon encouraged to hope that all would end well, and without scandal. It would also be disastrous for Sir Rawdon Wells. Even if Wells were proved innocent, the story would follow him like a snarling dog throughout his life. He would be the man who had been accused of kidnapping or murdering Eve Carroll, and many people would always believe that 'something had been hushed up.'

Constant dancing attendance upon Mrs. Gillett had gained Dagon a point or two. She had confided to him that she was 'mediumistic.' All her life, since childhood, she had 'seen things.' How and why she had come to Hidden Hall Court as housekeeper (a post in which she appeared to be an amateur) Dagon could not find out to his satisfaction. She had done some services for Sir Rawdon Wells' family in the past: he had always kept

track of her, she said, vaguely. Investments of hers had gone wrong. She had been in temporary trouble. Just then, the housekeeper's place had been vacant. Sir Rawdon had offered it to her. Fanny had wished her to accept, and she had done so. But she had never been happy in the house. She had seen many ghosts. Even by daylight she saw them. Among others was the spirit of the vanished bride of the first Sir Rawdon who had ever lived at Hidden Hall Court. This ghost had appeared after the invitation had been given to the Hastes for their honeymoon. It had come also to Mrs. Gillett in dreams, warning her that much the same fate as her own would befall the new bride if she ventured to visit Hidden Hall Court.

Mrs. Gillett stated that she had told Sir Rawdon all this, begging him to repeat the story to no one. He had promised to keep the secret, but he had laughed at the 'warning.' Mrs. Gillett would have liked to write Miss Carroll, even if it were only an anonymous letter, begging her not to come to the Court, but this she had not dared to do. She had, however, suggested that Fanny should speak to Captain Haste—not mentioning the ghostly 'warning,' but hinting that the drainage was not in a perfect state. This Fanny had refused to do. As she had herself frankly confessed to Dagon, if Kennedy Haste was determined to marry Eve Carroll, she wanted them to spend their honey-

moon at Sir Rawdon's place. There were those letters of Eve's she expected to find in Sir Rawdon's desk, and show to Haste!

What Fanny said, Dagon took with many grains of salt. The more he saw of the housekeeper's daughter, the more he felt convinced that she had had a far more serious motive for wishing Eve Carroll to be under that roof, and for wishing to be under it at the same time herself. As for Mrs. Gillett, however, the detective could not help believing more or less in her sincerity. He took it that she honestly thought she had seen ghosts at the Court. But there was something more than the spirit bride's 'warning' which had wrecked her nerves, making her jump at the slightest sound. She had perhaps told him no untruths, but she had not told all the truth.

The night of the day when he telegraphed Murdoch 'At any price get into that house,' the detective was restless. He had been excited by the news from Portree, which had affected him like a draught of strong wine; and with his 'theory' dancing bright as a will-o'-the-wisp before his eyes, he determined to have another look round the cellar after every one was stowed away for the night.

Having been given his choice of a bedroom (save for those occupied by Wells, Haste, and other members of the household), Dagon had selected quarters overlooking the Persian garden. He

made this choice, because the room he asked to have was directly above the tapestry boudoir, and a staircase not far from his door would take him down to that region without delay if need arose. Also, the Persian garden fascinated him. It formed a court enclosed on three sides and open only at one end, beyond which could be seen immense Lebanon cedars. These shut out England, as with a dark screen, and helped the garden to give a perfect illusion of the East.

There were queer little trees cut in strange shapes, with red roses looped over them. The paths were paved with wonderful tiles brought in the eighteenth century from Persia by a John Hidden, a great traveller. Also, there was the pool designed and made by him, one of the last Hiddens who had reigned at the Court. It was longer than square, this pool, and at each end was a curious flower-bed, always kept precisely as it had been planned two centuries ago. These beds represented Persian prayer rugs, the blended colours of the low-growing, dim-tinted blossoms forming the patterns of the rugs. Seen from the windows overlooking the garden, the effect was extremely beautiful; and the marvellous tiles which lined the sides of the pool could be seen for some distance down under the clear green water. Whether the bottom of the pool was paved in the same gorgeous and extravagant way was unknown, as it was

supposed to be very deep ; and fresh water flowing in from a spring, it did not need to be drained. Now and then a glint of silver or gold flashed under the surface as fish glided through the beryl depths ; and as Dagon looked out from his window to-night, the moon lit the pool with a pale, mysterious glimmer.

Suddenly, as he gazed—scarcely conscious of what he saw, since his thoughts were elsewhere—a strange thing happened.

FOR a moment Dagon thought that there must be something wrong with his eyes—or his brain.

It seemed as if a light flashed up from the pool.

The sequined glitter of the moon lit the surface. But this light was different. The moon-glints were silver. The light that pulsed and disappeared was green. It made the pool look like a mirror.

‘Say, I hope I’m not going off my chump!’ Dagon mumbled, half aloud. But he did not cease to stare at the pool. He stared very hard, and without winking. He was afraid that he might miss the gleam—if it came again.

It did come again—a pale, emerald flash. But it vanished in an instant, leaving Dagon to wonder if he had really seen it. Then, once more there passed the fleeting glint; and it was either an optical illusion or else it was even more astonishing than it had seemed at first. The lights now flashed at regular intervals and with method. Almost before he knew what he did, Dagon found himself reading in a whisper—‘S.O.S.—S.O.S.!’

‘My God! Is it possible?’ he asked himself. ‘Have I gone mad? Or is this happening?’

He did not feel in the least mad. And apparently it was happening! Very faint as the lights were—so faint that, unless his eyes had been on the pool when they began, Dagon would have missed them—they were unmistakably not moonlight. When the detective had assured himself that somebody was signalling for help by means of lights thrown on the pool, he supposed that a torch was being used at a window or on the roof—or possibly focussed from a corner of the garden behind screening trees. But he leaned far out to peer in all directions, and found that every visible window was dark. No light flashed from the roof, nor from behind trees. Nevertheless those faint green flickerings still troubled the pool, dim as the pale flame of a glow-worm, yet plainly visible to a watching eye. ‘S.O.S.—S.O.S.’

But—was the gleam on the water—or under it?

Ah, that was what it looked like! As if the light shot up from beneath!

‘Good Lord!’ gasped Dagon. ‘I’ve got it at last!’

Without another word, or even without another thought, he kicked off his shoes, and taking the electric lantern he had got ready for his excursion to the cellar, he padded, panther-like, out of the room.

How he blessed himself for going to the window ! If he had not looked down at the pool at that moment he would have missed this wonderful chance. But that was his luck ! He believed that Fate had drawn him to the window at precisely the right time. Instead of the vague prow through the cellars he had intended, now he was able to fix upon a definite goal. His brain felt singularly clear, as if those pale green flashes had lit the dark places where doubt had lurked. The thick cobwebs of mystery had been brushed away. Behind them Dagon could almost see a door !

At last he understood why the architect's industrious measurements had been made in vain. Nothing had been discovered in the house, because there was nothing to discover—except a way out. The ' hidden hall ' existed, as the name of the house indeed indicated, with its impudent play upon words ; but it was under the pool in the Persian garden.

Somebody in those spacious old days of the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century had been very clever : probably the Sir John Hidden who had made the Persian garden. First, he had brought in workmen, secretly, no doubt, most likely foreigners. They had created the ' hidden hall,' for who could tell what fantastic uses ? They had roofed it with glass (those signals seen through the water proved that) in order to let in

light from above, and the pool had completed the plan.

All this was easy enough to deduce now, Dagon thought. But—how account for the light of the signals ?

The water was deep, and it would need a strong light to shine through, even to give those faint flashes he had seen. Oil lamps would not suffice, even if the flashes could be managed. Some one down there might have a powerful electric torch which, used in darkness, would produce the effect. This suggestion, however, did not appeal to the detective's common sense. The call for help could only have been sent out by one in danger—a prisoner who wished to escape, and sought every expedient. It was not probable that a prisoner would be provided with a large electric torch, especially if that prisoner were the person in Dagon's mind. Yet who, unless Sir Rawdon Wells or Sir Rawdon's father had done it, could have fitted the 'hidden hall' with electricity ?

This was one of the first questions that Dagon asked himself when he had stopped to think consecutive thoughts again. And though he had no answer ready, he was strangely sure that Rawdon Wells had not lied to him.

'If there is a hidden room, which I very much doubt, the secret of it has been lost to our family for generations,' Wells had solemnly assured him.

Could some outsider have discovered the place by accident? There was one outsider who—Dagon was obstinately convinced—might have done so. And it would not have been impossible for that person to make such changes or improvements as seemed good to him.

Not only was Dagon certain where he must seek for the way into the hidden hall, he was also certain of the signaller's identity. It was not Eve Carroll who had sent that silent call for help. The spoilt, petted beauty's boasted 'war work' would not have necessitated the learning of wireless telegraphy—nothing so troublesome and boring! She had come over from New York to Paris and London on the pretext of 'work.' Dagon pictured her selling programmes at matinees, however, or reading to convalescent officers. 'Stunts' more strenuous, he thought, would not have been in her line, though no doubt she'd been lavish with her money. But Pan—brave little Pan—she was the girl to pick up wireless telegraphy while other flappers read novels and ate chocolates. She was the girl whose presence of mind in danger would prompt her to use the knowledge she had in an emergency. It was Pan, his lost sister, in the red cloak, who had been urged by the call of kindred blood to summon the brother her soul remembered!

'I'll save her,' Dagon promised himself. 'I'll

save her all right, no fear. It's meant to happen that way !'

The old house was dark and very quiet. It was an hour when those under its roof should be asleep. The detective had purposely waited until late for his visit to the cellar. But he walked cautiously lest some board should creak, and some ear catch the sound. He was a privileged person at Hidden Hall Court, and had a right to go and come as he pleased, even after midnight ; but if his unproved—perhaps unprovable—suspicions were just, there would be a spy about the place, bound by love, or fear, or money, to report upon his movements. He guessed that this spy and Fanny Gillett were 'in the same skin' ; and Fanny was an adversary not to be despised, even by Dagon of Scotland Yard. Her room was far from his—as far as the farthest end of the house—but, if she were watching him it would be by night as well as day. Her experience as a V.A.D. must well have accustomed her to 'night duty.'

Dagon used the secret door and staircase leading down from the tapestry boudoir in order to reach the cellar. He chose this way because he knew that a dog of Fanny Gillett's—a sharp-voiced fox-terrier—slept in the housekeeper's room ; and he would have to pass that door, if he descended to the cellar by the obvious route.

He knew the secret of the spring, over which he

had brooded a good deal lately, and the mechanism was practically noiseless, if carefully handled. But to-night he was excited and must have bungled, for the door behind the tapestry stuck in its groove and the push he had to give sent it home with violence. Dagon had shut each door behind him as he passed, yet the noise the tortured mechanism made seemed to his jangled nerves to echo through the house. It seemed, too, that he heard some other sound—a sigh, a rustle, the tap of a heel, and had he been superstitious, his heart would have jumped, for the tapestry boudoir was haunted by the ghost of the long-vanished bride—that mysterious beauty who had disappeared two centuries ago, as Eve Carroll had disappeared the other night.

The detective, however, prayed it might be nothing more perilous to his plan than a ghost. He would have secured his retreat by closing the secret door again, but dared not do so lest it should stick once more. His electric lantern guided him down the narrow stairway in the thickness of the wall, and then the cellar opened out before him—the cellar of the furnace, and of Sir Rawdon's laboratory.

The cave-like depths under the old house (of which this central portion was the oldest part) were black as pitch, save for the small wandering rod of light sent forth by his electric lantern.

Dagon paused for a moment, mentally taking his bearings. The Persian garden and the pool should be south, or straight ahead of him as he stood. This was the wall, then, where he must search, he told himself! There should be a brick which masked a spring. To find it among a thousand other bricks would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Nevertheless he would find it. He must!

‘I’ve got till dawn,’ he muttered. ‘But the sooner the better. Who knows what’s happening down there?’ The words made no sound, yet at that instant a door opened, and a light streamed out, shining full upon his figure, dimming the lantern glow. It was the door of the laboratory, and framed in it appeared Rawdon Wells.

Chapter XXIII 'I have Fallen in Love with Pan'

BOTH men were surprised. Each exclaimed the other's name. For the detective there was no need to excuse his presence in the cellar, but it was different with Sir Rawdon Wells. He knew that he was under suspicion, and probably guessed, if he did not actually know, that he might have been arrested instead of remaining in his own house 'on parole,' had it not been for Dagon.

'I came down here to-night because I had the most amazing dream,' Wells explained instantly, as if expecting a question. 'I simply had to come. I think you'll believe, Dagon, that I'd no hidden motive—no intention of doing anything the police would disapprove for a man in my position. I suppose you're here for a quiet look at something or other that's struck you as interesting. But if you don't mind, I'd rather like to tell you about that dream, and see what you think of it. There's nothing in it, I suppose! Still, I can't get the impression out of my head.' As he spoke he touched a switch, which lit the whole cellar.

Dagon thought of the signals. Those S.O.S. calls hadn't been sent out for nothing. He might at best be a long time in finding the way to that 'hidden hall' under the pool, so he had no time to waste in discussing queer dreams.

'Do you know what a "hunch" means in good American and Canadian?' Dagon asked.

'It means a kind of "flair" or inspiration that you ought to do something, or that something's likely to happen, doesn't it?' said the other.

'Yes, that's about it, if it can be put into proper language—which it can't, exactly,' returned Dagon. 'Well, I've got a "hunch" that I'm going to do a stunt of sorts down here to-night. And if you don't mind, I think I ought to be alone, when I—er—start my incantations, so to speak. Not that I don't trust you. I think you know I do. But——'

'I understand,' Wells filled up the embarrassed pause. 'Unofficially you giye me the benefit of the doubt, or rather more, and I have a lot to thank you for. Yet officially you're for Scotland Yard; and Scotland Yard eyes me askance. I'm supposed to know some dark secrets of this poor old house, and to use them for devilish ends. The theory is, if I stayed here looking on while you followed your star—or "hunch"—I might hinder rather than help—what?'

'Well, I'd like to hear the details of your dream

a little later,' said Dagon evasively. 'But meanwhile—will you tell me one thing before you—er—go upstairs?'

Wells smiled at the hint. 'Certainly. Whatever you like.'

'Had the dream anything to do with Miss Carroll—I mean, Mrs. Haste?'

'No. It had to do with Pandora—Miss Haste.'

'Ah!' Dagon could not keep back the exclamation. 'Did you dream she was calling for help?'

'I did dream that very thing. How did you guess?'

'I don't know. I do guess things! I generally guess right. And I've been thinking a whole lot about Miss Haste lately!'

'You have?' A note of surprise, perhaps of resentment, sounded in Wells' voice. (This pleased Dagon. He had played for it.) 'Why?' Wells went on. 'You've never even seen her, I think?'

'I've seen her photograph. And I've heard enough about her to know—not just to think, but to know!—that she must be about the bravest, most loyal girl this side of—well, not to exaggerate, let's say the North Pole.'

'She's all of that,' agreed Rawdon Wells. 'You say you—a stranger—have been thinking about her a good deal. It isn't very strange then, considering what she tried to do—what she sacri-

ficed—for me, that I should be thinking of her—dreaming of her too—all the time.'

'No, it seems to me it would be a bit strange if you didn't,' agreed Dagon. 'Still, I hope you'll forgive my butting in on your affairs! You see, I've had to make them my business, and you've had to make me some confidences. You told me yourself you'd been hard hit—over Miss Carroll's marriage. So you must be thinking of her some of the time—eh?—to the exclusion of Miss Haste.'

'Not to the exclusion of Miss Haste,' Wells caught him up. 'I don't mind anyone knowing—especially you—that I've come to my senses these last days—these tragic days. I've seen clearly—myself as I am, and things as they are. If Pandora Haste were in my reach at this minute, and I weren't a suspected kidnapper—or worse—I should ask her to be my wife.'

'Well! I should say you had come to your senses with a vengeance, Sir Rawdon!' almost gasped the detective.

'Not that I'm at all sure she'd take me,' Wells amended.

'Of course, that's the proper spirit,' said Dagon. 'But we've both got brains in our heads. The girl was ready to throw away her life and everything else to save you—and without much hope of gratitude.'

‘She’s got the gratitude, though,’ broke out Wells. ‘And a thousand times more!’

‘Hurrah!’ cried Dagon, like a boy; then stopped, looking confused under Rawdon Wells’ surprised stare.

‘You see, I’m pleased,’ the detective explained. ‘I like things to work out right in this life. Don’t think I’ve got the cheek of the devil if I ask, “Are you falling in love with Miss Haste?” Honestly, quite a lot hangs on it. I’ll explain, if you’ll answer.’

‘I will answer,’ said Rawdon. ‘I’m not “falling in love.” I have fallen in love with Pan. Since all this happened, and what she did for me, I’ve wondered if I was ever really in love with Miss Carroll. I thought I was mad about her—for a while. And that’s the right word; I was “mad”! Her eyes—that smile of hers every one talked about—and—and the perfume which always hung about her, used to drive me half out of my senses. Every man wanted her. I thought I wanted her too. I believed that she cared. I’ve told you, we weren’t actually engaged, but I thought it amounted to that. And it was a blow over the heart when she wrote—she didn’t tell me by word of mouth—that she’d changed her mind. She found she hadn’t loved me. Kennedy Haste was the only man she’d ever seen whom she wanted to marry. The day I sent her back the letters she asked for—just pretty little notes, nothing in them really

to hurt Ken, if he'd seen them !—I did feel I could kill her and him both. But——'

' Ah ! ' Dagon cut in sharply. ' You never told me this before. You sent back her letters. That's why Fanny Gillett searched in vain for them where she expected they could be found. Did you, by the by, express those sentiments to anyone ? '

' Yes, to Pan. I've been reproaching myself for it. And it wasn't only then. It was afterwards. It was on the day of the wedding. But that time I wasn't in earnest. I'd got over the worst. I said the thing—well, out of sheer damnable idiocy, and to see how Pan would open her big eyes. Wondering why she came here that night, I remembered suddenly. It burst upon me like a bomb. The girl came because I said to her, " Now another wicked Sir Rawdon of Hidden Hall Court will have his chance to make a bride disappear." I believe the poor child must have taken that in earnest—thought I'd asked the Hastes here for their honeymoon with a fiendish motive. That's why she came. And that's why—on top of all the proofs against me—Pan believed me guilty—why she took the crime—if there's been a crime—on herself. Do you wonder I've turned to her ? That I see I must unconsciously have loved her since she was a child, and that I shall love her all the rest of my life—whether it's short or long ? '

‘No, I don’t wonder,’ said Dagon. ‘The wonder was always the other way round. It wouldn’t have been my business exactly, if I hadn’t every reason to believe that Miss Pandora Haste and I are brother and sister. You know who it is I look like now, don’t you? Well, I was a foundling and she was a foundling. I’ve seen the cloak she wore as a baby when she was left at the Hastes’ door. A waistcoat I had on when I turned up alone in Canada was made of the identical stuff, with the same kind of buttons; and though I’ve no time to explain much more to you just now, I’ll say this: I’m tracing our origin back to your house—to your family, Sir Rawdon Wells!’

‘Good heavens! It sounds like a fairy story!’ Wells exclaimed.

‘It does, but it isn’t. I haven’t cleared the whole line yet, but I will clear it. Even now I see—I think I see—that what happened to Eve Carroll in this house the other night and what happened to my sister and me, all those years ago, can be traced back to the same cause. I asked if you loved Pandora, because, if you did, I’d made up my mind to trust you—to tell you a thing I would not have told you otherwise—a thing that perhaps, as a detective from Scotland Yard, watching you among others, I’ve no right to tell.’

'Tell it, if it concerns her. I swear you can trust me!' cried Wells.

'I will. And I do trust you,' Dagon said. 'You are one of my "hunches"! But first I want to ask you two questions. I've asked you one of them before, in another form, and you refused to answer. Perhaps you won't refuse again now. Who is the man who has schemed to ruin you, your deadly enemy who abducted or killed Eve Haste, and kidnapped Pandora to keep her from defending you?'

'You're mistaken,' answered Wells. 'You never asked me that question. And I'm not able to answer it. I have no deadly enemy, so far as I know.'

'You may consider him an intimate friend! I asked you for whose sake you came down to the Court on the night of the wedding. It's the same thing.'

'No!' Wells flung back, his impassioned Italian face suddenly hard, and obstinately English. 'No, it's not the same thing. My coming here had nothing to do with an enemy, and even though you may prove to me that you're Pan's brother, I can't answer that question.'

'Then I'll find out myself,' said Dagon. 'And I may find out to-night.'

'To-night!' Wells stared blankly.

‘Yes. Listen. I promised to trust you. You won’t trust me, but I’ll not back out of my word for that. I believe Pandora Haste is imprisoned in your Hidden Hall, perhaps Eve Carroll, too. I believe I know who put them there, and why. And I believe I know where that hidden hall is. If you hadn’t told me you cared for the girl, I’d have got you out of this cellar at any price, and I’d have done my own exploring alone. As it is, I’ll let you help me if you like.’

‘If I like! But I can’t help fearing you are mistaken about that hidden hall. I never——’

‘Now for my second question. What precisely did you dream about Pandora?’

‘That she was calling for help. That I was in my laboratory, and heard her. I knew it was nonsense. But I couldn’t resist dressing myself and coming down.’

‘But you heard nothing?’

‘Nothing.’

‘You couldn’t—in the laboratory. But if you’d been in my room, you’d have seen her calling for help—light signals, S.O.S.’

Then, in a few words, he explained to Wells what had happened. ‘Two heads are better than one,’ he finished. ‘I know you’ve never believed there was a secret room, in spite of the legend of the bride, and all the queer rumours—in spite of the stairway that ought to mean something, and has

never been accounted for. But you may give me points at finding the spring of a door which must exist, and exist in that very wall we're both facing now.'

AFTER all, it was not one of the thousand bricks that masked a spring. A stone in the flagging, close to the wall and in a corner had a tiny hole in it, so small that a large pea would have filled it. Having tested every brick within the reach of a tall man, the two had stood puzzled and at a loss, when suddenly Dagon burst out: 'You see that hole in the big corner stone there?'

'Yes,' said Wells, 'if you mean the hole about the size of my little finger nail.'

'You've hit it! But it's bigger than that. I bet I could slip in my stylograph. And I believe I'll try to see what happens.'

'You'll probably lose your pen. That's what'll happen. What are you thinking of?'

'The same thing that other fellow thought of when his eyes lit on it.'

'What "other fellow" ?'

'The chap who was looking for the hidden hall; and when he'd sampled about a million bricks, just as we have, came up against this corner—as

we've done. By accident, his eyes fell on that hole, as ours have fallen. He said to himself—as I did—"Gosh!" (or maybe something more polite!) "I bet that's what I've been hunting!" He then stuck in a pen, or a stick, or anything that would fit. If he was right in his surmise, why, he got where he wanted to get. He hired an electrician of sorts to carry on this smart electric wiring of yours into the hidden hall, and perhaps made a few other improvements, for his own benefit, in case of need. And I guess already he saw the need—made his plans, I mean, which afterwards he carried out. Now, I'm going to experiment as he did. And we shall see—what we shall see!'

What they did see, when Dagon had pressed his stylographic pen into the hole, was a sinking of the great stone, after one sharp, tell-tale 'click.' The stone went down a few inches and slid under another of the same size. A square opening was left, black as ink, and just big enough to admit the passage of a slender man's shoulders.

'There'll be a ladder underneath,' said Dagon. 'I'm going down with my lantern.'

'Let me go!' urged Wells. 'We don't know what kind of man-trap there mayn't be down below there. Besides, this is my house. It ought to be my job.'

'I shan't give it up to anyone,' said the detec-

tive. 'If there is a man-trap, I can look out for myself as well as the next chap can, I guess. Which of us two would Pandora miss more—anyhow, if things went wrong with one of us—a brother she never saw or heard of, or you, the man she'd have sold her life to save?'

'That isn't the question,' Wells argued.

'It is for me. And here goes! Wish me luck. When I call, you can follow. Say, have you got a pistol, or anything like that handy?'

'I had one,' said Rawdon. 'Anson took it—with apologies.'

'Well, nobody's taken mine—yet. I've got it on me, and if those signals down below meant a hurry call, maybe I shall need it. Maybe, too, the gentleman you and I have been playing at cross purposes about is with the ladies.'

'If there's a man below, I will not believe it's the one you're hinting at,' Wells insisted. 'But look here, Dagon, if you think for a moment we've a chance of finding Eve Carroll, for Heaven's sake don't move further till one of us—you or I—has called her husband. He has a right to be in this game, and would never forgive us if we didn't bring him in with us.'

'Gee! You're right. I didn't think of it,' confessed Dagon. 'I guess I was thinking of too many other things. You fetch him.'

'Haste and I haven't been meeting or speaking,'

Wells demurred. 'You know he suspects me still—sometimes, I think, more than ever.'

'Only half heartedly,' said Dagon. 'And now's your chance to justify yourself with him by doing the generous thing. Tell him I found out the secret——'

'It's the truth!'

'That's so, as it happens. But even if it weren't, it would never do to let him think you'd found it. He'd believe you had known where to look all the time. I expect soon to be in a position to prove my theory to him, and exonerate you for ever—but no use beginning with a prejudice. Tell him I've found the secret, and you proposed bringing him down.'

'You'll wait?'

'Unless something unforeseen turns up. But hurry!'

Wells raced upstairs the shortest way, which was not by the secret staircase. He did not stop to think or care how much noise he made, Dagon reflected, but shrugged his shoulders. After all, it didn't matter now if the 'spy' were roused. They had found the way to the hidden hall. Nothing and no one should prevent them from getting at its secret.

Upstairs in the wing where Kennedy Haste slept, Wells' hurried steps slackened. He and Ken had been pals since boyhood, but since Eve Carroll

had come into their lives, the friendship which had seemed to them both warranted to wear all weathers, had been but an empty name. Since the wedding and Eve's disappearance, even that name had ceased to cover Haste's true feelings. Rawdon felt that Ken hated him, believed the worst of him, at heart gave him no 'benefit of the doubt.' Their forced presence in the same house had made things worse—Rawdon's house, where Eve had vanished—the house which neither man could leave until the mystery was solved.

Wells had not stopped to settle in his mind how much he should explain to Haste when he had waked him. The explanations he had to give had seemed easy till he reached the door, and stood hesitating before he tapped. But Dagon had told him to hurry. There wasn't a moment to waste in making up his mind what to say. That must settle itself.

He tapped lightly, ready to knock again if need be. A'inst instantly, however, a light was switched on, and the door opened. Haste must have been awake.

'You!' he said roughly, at sight of Wells.

'Yes. I—that is we—Dagon and I' (Rawdon cursed himself for stammering) 'want you to come down to the cellar at once. Dagon has made a very important discovery. Ken, I know you've doubted me—unjustly, I swear to God!—but in

a few minutes you—all of us—may get hold of the truth. Don't hope too much. But Dagon believes we may find Eve as well as Pandora. Someone has been signalling, but there's no time to explain all that now. Come and see for yourself.'

Haste could not speak. Strength had gone out of him. His heart raced like an engine, and his hands shook as he tried to slip a dressing-gown on over his pyjamas. A few moments ago the thought of being touched by his one-time friend would have repelled him. Now, he hardly realized that he was being helped by the man he had hated. He thrust his bare feet into slippers, and was ready to start.

* * * * *

'If only Fanny would come back!' was the prayer in Mrs. Gillett's heart as she wandered ghost-like to the room of ghosts—the tapestry boudoir which always fascinated her because she feared and hated it. Fanny's bedroom was next to hers, and she had heard the girl steal out. There was no tiny noise she did not hear at night, for she slept as little as a human being can sleep and live.

For a time the woman had lain still, listening, hoping. Then, when all was silent she could no longer bear the suspense. She dressed herself and flitted downstairs with a candle. At the sound of Dagon's footsteps she had pressed her hand

over the flame to extinguish it, and prevent there being any smell of smoke. Then she had stooped low behind a high-backed Queen Anne chair, and Dagon had not seen her. The faint rustling he had put down to his own excited fancy, or to the sounds there always are in the very old houses at night.

‘What is he doing at this hour opening the secret door?’ she wondered uneasily. The detective had a business-like air, as if he were making for some definite goal. She had not seen him like that before, in any search he made, when she had quietly watched, not appearing to watch.

‘What can he have found out?’ she asked herself. ‘Nothing, surely. It is not possible.’ And yet, she knew that Fanny feared his getting upon the right track. As for her, what did it matter? Nothing mattered in this world. But Fanny—Fanny was so mad about Kennedy Haste. She would do anything to keep him from his wife. And if the detective should ‘get on the right track’ before all the plans had been carried out, Mrs. Gillett actually feared her daughter.

The whole affair was ghastly. Heaven knew how she loathed it, how she would have kept out of it if she could. But she had been forced into the tangle for Fanny’s sake.

She had hoped at first when she heard Fanny’s door creak lightly that the girl had gone to look

again for those letters which obsessed her. Several times she had sought them in different places. By day, in Rawdon Wells' own room, when she was sure he was not there, and her mother was on guard. By night, after he'd gone to bed, in his study. But she was not in the study to-night. Mrs. Gillett had looked. She had not dared try to follow to that other place she suspected. Now, even if she had dared, it was too late. The detective was on his way to the cellar, with that air of meaning to do something definite!

If he should accomplish a miracle, and—if Fanny should be caught!

'What can I do?' Mrs. Gillett wondered miserably. 'Shall I tell him?'

Presently, after some nervous fluttering and indecision, she answered her own questions by returning upstairs, and knocking at a certain door. It was not quite an ordinary knock that she gave. There were three taps; an interval; and again three, as if a preconcerted warning were intended. 'It is the one you know; don't be alarmed,' the discreet signal seemed to say.

Soon the door was opened a few inches. No one looked out, and the only light was that of the moon streaming through a large uncurtained window at the end of a corridor. But Mrs. Gillett had no doubt as to who it was silently awaiting her words.

‘I’m frightened,’ she whispered. ‘The detective has gone down to the cellar.’

‘What of that?’ a voice answered with a note of irritation. ‘He has been there many times. He’ll have no more luck than others. He likes to prowl at night. It makes him feel his importance, poor wretch. Need you have disturbed me for that? I get little enough rest.’

‘I—am sorry,’ faltered Mrs. Gillett. ‘I hardly knew whether to wake you or not. Only—I think Fanny is there. Did you give her a key?’

‘No,’ said the voice. ‘But there’s no key to the room she’s interested in. There are two bolts. She has no right to go there without me. Why should she go? The girl’s illness is past. She is not needed as a nurse. And there’s no other excuse for her——’

‘I told you I was frightened,’ Mrs. Gillett repeated. ‘And Dagon looked different to-night. I saw him. He didn’t see me. I believe—I feel—he thinks that he has found out something.’

‘He may think so. I do not,’ the voice replied. ‘But your daughter should not be there. I am angry with her.’

‘What can you do?’

‘I will go down.’

‘But—if you meet Dagon?’

‘I shall have an excuse. I will get him away. You can trust me to do that. When he’s got rid

of, 'I'll deal with your daughter. Get back to your own room now. I must make myself ready to be seen.'

The woman flitted along the hall like a shadow. The door shut.

* * * * *

Fanny Gillett had the same fear, or presentiment, that chilled her mother. She felt that the man from Scotland Yard was on the brink of a discovery. She had seen him receive telegrams, and she guessed that he suspected some one in the house—herself or another—because he lurked about out of doors and took the yellow envelopes himself. Twice or three times this had happened in a day and a half. He must, therefore, have expected the telegrams, and not have cared to waste time by having them safely addressed to the nearest post office and going there himself to get them. Probably, too, there was something in the telegrams which Dagon desired should not be seen by anyone at Hidden Hall Court. Fanny had mentioned this, and her own anxiety, to one person at the Court, and had been laughed at. This person had such sublime faith in his star and his plans that he would not believe in the 'trouble' she gloomily predicted. Miss Gillett was silently resentful. She was not serving the man for his own sake alone. She had run risks because she was

ready to do anything, no matter what, if Eve Carroll might go for ever out of the life of Kennedy Haste. What happened to others—Rawdon Wells or Pandora Haste—was of little importance. As a V.A.D. nursing at the Front she had seen too many horrors to blench easily; and her nature was capable of tenderness only for one man.

‘That little beast of a detective has got something up his sleeve,’ she thought. ‘I know he has, only I don’t know what. It may be what we’re hiding here. Or—it may be Skye. Or it may be both, for he’s the devil! But if he thinks he’s going to hand back the bride to Kennedy Haste to the sound of joyous music, why, he’s mistaken.’

Miss Gillett was afraid of the man for whom she worked, but there was another emotion in her heart stronger than fear. He had no secrets from her, because her services as nurse had had to be called in for an inmate of the Hidden Hall; and he had watched her like a lynx, knowing that she would laugh for joy at seeing her patient dead. Twice she had descended with him, and now she was going alone. Because she did fear the man, however, she determined that no trace of her presence should be visible to spying eyes. She had watched carefully all that he did, and she knew how to leave as well as to enter the secret place under the pool. She had a good electric torch, and when she had got far enough down the ladder under the

stone with the hole in it, she found the spring which swung that stone back into place.

At the bottom of the iron ladder was a small open space. Air reached it from little apertures above, placed so as to be invisible to anyone searching the cellar. Beyond was a short and narrow passage, on either side of which opened a room. They had apertures for ventilation also, as her companion had pointed out during Fanny Gillett's first visit; but these had their outlets in the Persian garden.

They were so cleverly placed, though the work had been done in old days, that no sound could penetrate to the garden by means of them. The various curves and bends obviated this danger, for they were arranged somewhat after the fashion of modern Tobin tubes. As for the electric lighting of these rooms which Miss Gillett had remarked upon, there was not enough power, her guide explained, to let light pass through the thick glass and the deep water above it. He had made sure of that, and if any light could be seen, it would be taken for a reflection from sky or window. All water appeared to hold a little light, like a drop of quicksilver in the hollow of a hand; in any event, there could be no more than that faint glimmer.

There was an electric bulb also in the corridor, but with her torch Fanny did not need to touch the switch. She made no noise until she began

cautiously to slip back first one bolt, then the other. But she was heard. Something moved inside the room. Or was it in the one opposite? Miss Gillett could not be sure till she pushed the door open.

THE light was on in the tiny room with its glass roof, and Eve Haste stood near the cot bed screening herself behind a chair, the back of which she grasped tightly with both hands, as if ready to use it in self-defence.

At sight of Fanny Gillett her hands fell to her side, and as the door shut showing that the nurse was alone, she subsided limply on the bed. Her face was deathly pale in the dim, unbecoming light. Her hair hung in two long, ruffled plaits, and she wore an ugly grey woollen dressing-gown, much too large for her, lent by the nurse. But even so, she looked beautiful. Miss Gillett acknowledged this to herself with angry reluctance.

‘Oh, it’s you!’ Eve said dully. ‘What do you want?’

‘I’ve brought you some medicine,’ Fanny answered. ‘He sent it.’

‘I don’t need any medicine,’ the girl protested. ‘I’m well enough in health. Oh, Miss Gillett, I know you don’t like me—you never did—but you’re a woman—not so much older than I am.’

You've come down here alone, without that fiend. Say it means that you're going to help me, I beg—I implore! When I'm free I'll give you thousands of dollars—pounds, I mean. You can be rich. You——'

'I'm not the kind that does things for pay,' replied Fanny. 'I can't set you free. But take this stuff I've brought, and you'll feel better.'

'I don't wish to take it,' said Eve. 'I—I'm afraid of you. I believe you'd like me to die. I believe you'd poison me. I see it in your eyes.'

'Rot!' the elder woman flung at the girl. 'I don't wish you any harm. I got drawn into this business through my mother. She's in the power of—you know who. He can blackmail her. He knows things about her past. Anyhow, I've done nothing but good to you. I brought you out of a faint once, and next time a fit of hysterics or something early Victorian of that sort. I'm a nurse. My business is to help people. I'm here to help you.'

'You'd help me to leave this world if you could!' cried Eve, staring wide-eyed at the set, dark face. 'You love Ken! You are in this horrible plot against me.'

Fanny's hot blood rushed to her brain, and she saw red. 'Yes, I do love Kennedy Haste!' she broke out. 'He's my man, not yours. I saved his life. It belongs to me. Why didn't

you stay faithful to Rawdon Wells ? You can take your choice now—for I've gone too far to go back. You'll drink this stuff I've brought and sleep quietly, or I'll choke the life out of you—whichever you like.'

For reply Eve screamed shrilly, and beat on the wall. 'Help!—help!' she shrieked. From somewhere came a muffled sound of knocking, as if in answer to hers.

Fanny Gillett laughed. 'So that's the game you've been playing, you two!' she exclaimed. 'Do you know who that is, pounding on the other wall?'

'No!' Eve gasped. 'Some prisoner like myself—some one that devil wants to suppress.'

'It's Pandora Haste, who likes you just about as well as I do,' said the nurse. 'You'd get no help from her, even if she were free.'

'I would!' cried Eve. 'Pan's an honourable girl—not a revengeful tigress like you!'

'Better not call names,' said Miss Gillett. 'Now for it again. Which do you choose—sleep or——?'

Eve's answer was to spring at the other with the lifted chair. Perhaps it was in her mind to surprise and stun the enemy, rush past her and through the door which locked only on the outside. But she was frail of build and weak from sleeplessness and anguish. Fanny Gillett was an amazon compared to her. With strong hands she seized

the chair and wrenched it from Eve, flinging it on the floor. The girl fell back with a moan of despair. But all hope was not yet dead in her heart. As the big woman rushed upon her she dodged under the greedy, outstretched arms, got to the door, and had it half-open when Fanny seized her by the throat. With a kick, the nurse slammed the door shut again. She had to kill Eve now. Even if her soul sickened at the job, it had got to be done, for her own protection. The small, cold hands, sparkling with rings, grasped her wrists. There was more strength in them than Fanny would have dreamed. But there was no question of how the battle must end. She squeezed the slim throat—the throat that Kennedy Haste had loved and kissed. Tighter!—tighter! The clasp on her wrists relaxed.

* * * * *

Dagon had promised Wells that he would wait, if ‘nothing unforeseen happened.’

He did wait, five minutes perhaps, and then heard the sound of footsteps. Into the lighted cellar came the fine figure of Marianti, the Italian butler.

The handsome old man was in a dressing-gown and slippers, but even so he was dignified, his white hair unruffled, his face serene and noble.

‘Signore!’ he exclaimed, surprised at sight of

Dagon standing beside a square dark aperture in the stone floor. 'Singore mio!'

'What brings you down here, Marianti?' the detective asked quietly, as the old man's dark eyes roved from him to the hole in the floor and back again.

'I 'ear noises in ze 'ouse, sare,' the butler explained. 'I 'ave fear zare may be tieves. Dio, signore! You 'ave find someting strange 'ere—yes!'

'Yes,' echoed Dagon.

''Ave I your permission, sare, to come closer, to look at zis 'ole you 'ave discover?'

'Certainly,' the detective said. His face was expressionless; but his eyes glittered. They were fixed on Marianti, while the old man, his hands plunged deep into the pockets of his dressing-gown as if for warmth in the chill of the cellar, stepped gingerly towards the hole in the floor. Suddenly, just at the last count of the second, he sprang. A knife gleamed, and—Dagon caught his wrist.

For an instant he believed he had won, for he had surprised the man who thought himself unsuspected. He was strong, too; but the other was stronger. Marianti edged him towards the hole, and Dagon read his wish—to throw him down there, and close the stone. He would lie stunned at the bottom of the pit, his neck broken, perhaps. Marianti imagined that he alone knew of this

hole's existence, and that none would ever guess how or where Dagon had vanished. The detective hated to be mastered by this prey which he had hunted ; but for the sake of others, rather than his own, he couldn't risk a stab just now.

' Wells ! Haste ! ' he yelled. ' Hurry ! '

The Italian started as if the raised knife had struck into his own flesh. Mechanically he flung a quick glance over his shoulder to see if he had been bluffed, and Dagon seized the chance he had wanted and lost for a moment—to test his jiu-jitsu. He was a rank amateur, a mere tyro of the art, but that backward glance lost Marianti. He crashed down in a heap, with a howl of anguish drawn forth by a twisted shoulder-joint, just as Rawdon Wells and Kennedy Haste bounded down the stairs.

' I've got him ! ' panted Dagon, who had secured the knife and seated himself on the writhing body. ' But he almost got me.'

' Marianti, the butler ! ' cried Wells. ' What the devil ——'

' That's the word for him—devil,' Dagon agreed. ' But his name's not Marianti. Don't you suspect yet ? '

' I don't know what you mean,' said Rawdon.

' Well, I've suspected the double identity for a day or two. I was only waiting to make sure. I didn't see this chance coming the way it has.

But it's a bit of luck. My, but he's a lovely one! He wriggles like a snake! What have we got to tie his hands with behind his back?'

'The cord of his own dressing-gown!' said Haste; and slipped it off.

'You're killing me! My shoulder's broken!' groaned the man; and Rawdon Wells jumped as if he had been shot.

'My God—his voice!' he stammered. 'It sounds——'

'Because it is—the voice of Paolo Magnani!' Dagon cut in. 'I knew it was Magnani at the bottom of all this—knew, but couldn't prove! And everything conspired to upset my theory. It wasn't till my man I'd sent to Skye got into a house at Portree where Magnani was supposed to be ill, and found no one but Davis who used to be butler here, that I was sure who this fellow was. I knew he was in the job, ever since he burnt some towels with blood on them, in your fireplace, to strengthen the case against you in spite of Pandora Haste. But I was a fool not to see the whole thing from that minute. Didn't Magnani always boast that no actor in Europe could touch him for make-up and disguise on the stage? Why not in private life? It took that news from Skye to beat it into my thick head. But now, with your permission, we'll have some fun with him. I've been spoiling for it.'

‘ Paolo Magnani—my cousin—my friend ! ’ broke out Wells, staring at the man who lay bound upon the floor. The Italian had ceased to struggle. He was in hideous pain.

‘ Et tu, Brute, and all the rest of it ! ’ said Dagon, giving back glare for glare to the black eyes cursing him from the floor. ‘ Listen, Sir Rawdon, did you ever promise to leave money or anything to your dear cousin ? ’

‘ He knew I meant to leave him everything I have, if I should die unmarried,’ Wells answered bitterly. ‘ Even this house, which I could do, as I’m the last of the line. He—in a way I felt I owed it to him. You see, his mother and mine were sisters. His was a singer. My father met her in Naples, and fell in love—or thought so. They were going to be married. Her twin sister, Francesca, came home from a tour in the provinces—she was an actress—for the wedding. It was a lightning stroke for my father and her. They felt they’d been born for each other. They went off together. If Francesca hadn’t come then, everything would have been different. All that I have would have been Paolo’s. As it was, his mother married a baritone in her own company. Her husband drank. They were always poor. Paolo had to get on as best he could. But he was a genius. If he hadn’t lost his voice—or injured it—he’d have been a great singer. As it is, he’s been great

in his line. I thought he cared for me as much as I cared for him. I trusted him completely. I——'

'Yes, and you kept silence for him when by speaking you might have saved yourself from the vilest suspicion—suspicion he plotted to throw on you!' cut in Dagon. 'The whole thing was a plot from beginning to end: his asking you to come here the night of the wedding—and the rest.'

'How do you know about that? What do you know?' Wells questioned sharply.

'I've put two and two together, and found they made four—that's all,' said the detective. 'I don't know anything much, if it comes to that. But wait till I show you something, and perhaps when you've seen it you won't refuse any longer to tell why you came that night, and what you really burned in that leather bag. You should tell to clear yourself with Captain Haste, if for nobody else—now.'

'What will you show me?' Rawdon wanted to know, for Dagon was on his knees by the prostrate man, unfastening at the neck the smart pyjama jacket Magnani wore under his common brown dressing-gown.

'Well, those blood stains that told so badly against you—or would have, if it hadn't been for Miss Haste—always puzzled me. There was so little blood, you see. It had been so beautifully

stage-managed, so to speak : a neat mark to fit your boot, Sir Rawdon—a boot from the pair that was burned ; and nice little patterns for fingers and thumb. It wouldn't have been worth while if the finger-prints hadn't been made from yours. Of course they were. Things like that are easy to get, with a bit of work. You can see how it's done in many detective novels, some of which I dare say my gentleman has read. Miss Haste spoilt the game, so far as the finger-prints were concerned. But why was there so little blood, I asked myself. The answer seemed to be that there wasn't much to spare. I knew if I could find a member of the household that night who had a small wound probably on the left arm, I should have the guilty man—or woman. But finding wasn't easy then. Now—look there !' His voice rose as he tore the silk jacket down and bared Magnani's left arm just below the shoulder. 'That's what I wanted. It isn't much. But it's enough. Oh, he was clever—deadly clever. Look at the way he prepared his alibi. Got Davis—mercenary old wretch—in his pay ; took on this job as butler, to be on the spot, while he gave out to every one that he was at Skye. At Skye, taking a picture ! And his company was there—is there ; believes he's there—ill in a house outside Portree. Just how he managed a lot of other things he did manage I don't see clearly yet, except that he had accom-

plices. I suspect them to be Mrs. Gillett and her daughter, and my notion is, there was some secret of the past that gave him the upper hand over the old lady. As for the girl, she'd be ready to work for him because she could further her own ends at the same time. But if you'd out with the truth about your visit here the night of the wedding, Sir Rawdon, I'd have things pretty clear.'

'I owe Magnani no loyalty now,' Rawdon said, 'and I'll tell you why I came. He'd stayed here sometimes. He liked the place, and when I was away I often lent it to him. He came to me in a state of desperation—so I thought—because he was in danger of compromising a married woman. He confessed—I believed it was a confession!—that she—I won't mention her name—had been here with him. There were letters of hers, and a frock, and a pair of slippers, in a monogrammed leather bag he'd forgotten to take away. The dress and slippers she'd given him as a souvenir of the dance when they'd first met. The husband—Paolo said—had gone into the affair—guessed she's been here, and was sending a detective to look for evidence. If those things were found, the woman was lost. But Paolo couldn't come. He was bound to start with the company for Skyc, or there'd be suspicion. He'd had warning too late. Would I motor down to the Court, he asked, burn all the things in the furnace and go on later to

Liverpool? I suggested taking the bag with me, instead of burning it, and throwing the things overboard some night at sea. But Paolo wouldn't hear of that. I might be followed. In the end I agreed to do as he asked. And it went without saying that when I was questioned, I wouldn't try to save myself by betraying him—and a woman.'

'He didn't count on you in vain, the blighter!' broke out Dagon. 'While you thought he was on the way north, he was here, in this beautiful white wig and get-up, on the spot, to add to the conflagration by burning a pair of your boots, and a skeleton. That's where he slipped, though! He must have bought the thing, and didn't know there was enough difference to be detected between a man's bones and a woman's. Now, if we want to fit in more pieces of the puzzle—the missing bits—we'll have to make the gentleman supply those himself. We'll prod them out of him.'

'Great heavens, you don't mean you'd torture him?' cried Rawdon, horrified. 'Vile as he is, I won't allow——'

'I don't mean what you think I mean,' Dagon cut in. 'Do you want the fellow sent to prison?'

'No!'

'Well then, promise him a chance to make his get-away if he'll give us the whole story. I think he'll accept the offer. But there's a time for all

things. This has been an interruption. Before we talk any more, two of us had better go down below and rescue one—or I think, two!—fair ladies, while the third stays here and sees that our prisoner doesn't escape.'

For the first time Haste spoke. 'You mean—that Eve—is there?'

'I'm pretty sure of it,' the detective answered.

'And my sister!' said Haste.

'My sister!' Dagon echoed.

NEVER had Dagon wanted anything so much in his life as to go down that ladder and be the first one to open the door of Pandora's room. He felt that by instinct she would recognize him as her brother. But he must sacrifice that wonderful moment to duty. He must be the man to guard Magnani, and let the others go.

Hardly had the two begun to descend when it occurred to Dagon that there might be a key in the pocket of Magnani. He found it as he expected, and tossed it to Haste. Ken missed it, however, and the big, ungainly bit of iron fell with a metallic crash at the bottom of the ladder. Wells, who had started first to descend, snatched the key as he stepped off the last round. The passage and the two doors were in front of him, and the image of Pan was in his mind as he tried the key in the door at the right. There was no keyhole he found, however, only two bolts, and both had been slipped back. He lifted the old-fashioned latch, and flung the door open. Light streamed out, and he had

scarcely time to take in the picture within, when Haste bounded past him.

It was no moment for remembering the amenities of life. Haste had looked over Wells' shoulder and had seen Fanny Gillett in the act of choking Eve to death. If he had had to kill Rawdon Wells to pass him, he would have done it then without a qualm of remorse. But Rawdon also saw the picture and did not blame his friend, as he stumbled back from the rough push. For an instant he lost his balance, for his lameness was a handicap; and recovering himself he caught at the door frame. It was but a second or two, yet there was time enough for Haste to tear Eve from Fanny Gillett's grasp, and fling the latter aside like a discarded glove.

There was horror and despair on Fanny's dark face—the despair of failure; but Haste did not see it. He saw only Eve. Rawdon thought he did not even know that Miss Gillett had fallen face down on the stone floor. She had let herself fall, and she lay quite still as if the end of the world had come for her.

‘Eve—Eve, my darling, my precious girl! Look at me—speak one word. Oh, thank God, I was in time! You're alive!’ Haste poured out the words passionately; his bride regained in his arms.

Rawdon moved away, and went to the door of

the room across the narrow passage. He turned the key in the lock, and even as he did so the door was pulled open by some one inside. There was light in this room also. Pan stood there looking at him, and holding back a curtain of old tapestry. 'Oh, Don!' she cried. 'It's been agony shut up here, because I could do nothing more to save you. But there's another prisoner. I believe it's Eve. If—'

'It is,' Rawdon broke in. 'Ken's with her. She'll soon be able to tell her own story, and I shall need no more saving by the bravest, best girl on earth. Do you never think of yourself, Pan?'

'I think more of the people I care for—you and Ken.'

'Pan, dearest, I want you to think of me in a class by myself, without Ken,' Rawdon said; 'because I've thought of no one but you since you disappeared. I've found out that you're the only girl in my world. I want to be the only man in yours—no, not that! It's too selfish. But I want to be the first. Is there a chance?'

'Why, you know you always have been first!' Pan answered. 'I couldn't help it. Do you really mean that you care, too?'

He took her in his arms, and held her tight, as if he would never let her go.

'I've lived for this!' he said. 'I dreamed

of you to-night—dreamed that you called for help—from down in the cellar.’

‘So I did. I signalled, switching on and off the light. I hoped—prayed—someone could see.’

‘Your brother saw.’

‘Ken! Where is he?’

‘He’s found Eve. But I didn’t mean Ken when I spoke of your brother. Are you strong enough to climb a ladder? If you are, you shall see him. He’s waiting up there. I owe you to him. Ken owes Eve to him. And, after me, I won’t grudge it if he comes second in your life!’

They left Fanny prone and still on the stone floor, scorning to punish the woman since she had failed in murder as she had failed in love. After a long time she stumbled to her feet, and heavily climbed the ladder. No one lay in wait to catch her. No one cared what she did or where she went. She wanted to die, yet life was strong in her veins. When she had gone out into the Persian garden and looked at the deep pool she turned away, sick and shivering. She did not return to the house. She did not wish to see her mother or learn what had happened to Magnani, though she was dully sure that all was over for him, as for her. She tramped to the railway station, dusty mile after dusty mile; and by a slow, early train she travelled with the dawn to London.

She knew that she would never again see the

man she loved, or the girl she hated and had nearly killed.

* * * * *

It was through promising him his freedom that Magnani was induced to confess. Mrs. Gillett spoke also; and through those two the whole long story was pieced together, detail by detail.

As Dagon had prophesied, it began long ago.

Mrs. Gillett as a youngish woman had been confidential maid to Lady Wells, Rawdon's Italian mother. Sam Gillett, the husband, was a Canadian—a seafaring man—sometimes with a ship of his own, sometimes idle. He had deserted his wife, leaving her with one child, a girl, whom she 'boarded out' when she first came to live with Lady Wells. But now and then, when he was 'down on his luck,' the man would return, get money from the woman and disappear again for months.

Francesca Wells and Sara Gillett adored the boy, Rawdon. Both would have made any sacrifice for him. And the day came when they did sacrifice their very souls in black dishonour.

A beautiful young woman called at Hidden Hall Court on that day. She brought with her a little boy and a baby girl; also some papers. The trio had arrived from Italy, but their name was English. The woman said that she was 'Lady

Wells,' and when Francesca asked how that could be, she showed the papers. These had been lately found, she explained; otherwise she would not have waited till her English husband was dead, to bring the children home to their father's house from Italy, her native land. He had been an elder brother of Rawdon's father, supposed illegitimate, unacknowledged by the family, a wanderer and a wastrel. But inside the lining of an old trunk which had been the mother's, papers were found proving the marriage. The little dark boy of four years old was the rightful owner of Hidden Hall Court, not Rawdon, the tall young Etonian of fifteen.

Francesca was already a widow. Her husband was a man of honour, and those papers would have settled matters for him. But they did nothing of the sort for her. She determined that her boy should not lose his inheritance. Yet she spoke kindly to her compatriot. She invited her to stay at the Court, and talk things over. She said a solicitor should be sent for from London next morning. This, however, was not done. The woman from Italy had been ill on the journey: heart trouble. She was put into a 'haunted room,' and told the story of the bride who had disappeared. In the night a white presence hovered over the bed, and an ice-cold hand was laid on the girl-mother's breast, while the children slept. Her

heart chilled under the fearful touch, and ceased to beat. So the papers were burned in the morning, and there was no need for the solicitor to come.

‘It was not murder,’ pleaded Mrs. Gillett. ‘What I did, I did for my lady, who had been good to me—helped me to provide for Fanny, and always gave me money for my husband, to get him away. I was dressed in white. I walked through the room. I bent over her. I had been holding my hand on a block of ice in the ice box. It must have been very cold when I laid it on her breast. That was all I did. And next evening I took the baby to London. My lady wanted me to leave it at the door of a foundling hospital. But it was a pretty child. I liked little girls, for Fanny’s sake. I thought it would be good for the baby to grow up a lady. She was drugged with soothing syrup. I had her in an old school box of Sir Rawdon’s. I’d made ventilation in it. I stopped the cab before another house. Then I carried the box a few doors farther on where the Hastes lived, and left it. My husband had come home some days before. He was in London, with money I’d given him, ready to go back to Canada. I gave him more money—and the boy. The young woman—the mother—I’d passed off at the Court as a cousin of mine. We had her buried at Ardry-le-Mare. The servants supposed I’d taken the children to their relations

in London. And the affair was forgotten. But never by me! I was not a murderess. Yet I suffered remorse. Sometimes I thought I should go mad. I was fascinated by the room where that Italian girl had died. My lady had to pension me off, and send me away, for I was no longer of use to her. I brought Fanny up—and I supported myself through the years. My lady died, leaving word with her son to be good to me—I deserved gratitude. And he was good—though he never knew why I'd been left as a charge upon him. But a few months ago what money I had saved was lost—through my husband. Sir Rawdon offered me a place here as housekeeper. Fanny wished me to accept, and I yielded to her. Ah, if I had not! The old horror was soon back upon me!

'One day I could not keep my tongue still—after all those years. I blurted out the truth to Fanny. And I was overheard. It was in the tapestry boudoir I talked. Mr. Magnani was visiting in the house. He heard something—not all—but enough for him to use as blackmail. I became his slave. I've been his slave ever since.'

Again, Dagon had been right in saying that all—even the affair of Eve Carroll's disappearance—could be traced back to the same cause.

Magnani had always hated Rawdon, grudging him his place in the world and the money which would have belonged to him if his mother had

not been jilted by the rich Englishman. He had wanted Rawdon to die ; but when he learned Mrs. Gillett's secret, he would have tried to marry Pan for the sake of the Court, if the papers proving her rights had not been destroyed. As for the money, it could come to him only through Rawdon's death, for it had mostly been made by Rawdon's father. Then Eve Carroll arrived upon the scene, and Magnani had fallen in love with her—in the one way he knew how to love. Besides, she was a great heiress. Even Rawdon's fortune was nothing compared with hers. But she had flirted a little, and—engaged herself to another man. Mrs. Payntor was left, as a last resort ; but by this time Magnani was deeply involved in a plan that, with luck, should win him everything he wanted : Hidden Hall Court ; Rawdon Wells' money (he meant to change his name legally to Wells, later, for he'd already been naturalized as a British subject) ; and perhaps Eve Carroll, the great heiress, for his own ; all without fear of suspicion falling upon him.

The awkward part, where his plans for Eve and himself were concerned, lay in the fact that they could not mature till the day she had become the wife of another man. This was because she could not be brought down to the Court until then. Her marriage to Haste, however, would not be an insuperable objection, for Magnani

looked far ahead. He honestly believed (if it were in him to do anything honestly) that Eve had liked him once. All women liked him. Besides, he had discovered about her that she was not physically brave. Once he got her into the place he had prepared, and threatened her with a violent death if she resisted, he could force the girl to follow out a certain programme. When it should be safe to do so, he would smuggle her in disguise out of her hiding place, and out of England. With his own mother (who still lived in a small town near Naples, supported by him) Eve could be safely left until Rawdon had been hanged for murder, and he—Paolo Magnani had come into his inheritance.

After that—months after, when the affair had been half forgotten—the dead could return to life. Even that act in the drama was arranged in Magnani's mind. Mrs. Haste was to be found in a village in France, having lost her memory. What had happened on the night of the wedding would for ever remain a mystery. She would recall nothing since a certain moment when she had left the music-room and run out of doors to frighten Kennedy Haste, because they had talked of an old ghost story—the tale of the vanished bride. She would have taken a bitter distaste for her husband, and would refuse to return to him. She would go to America with her aunt,

spend some months in a sanatorium. She would desire a divorce and get one in Reno, where such matters can be settled easily. No one would blame her for Rawdon's fate, as apparently she would have lost her reason temporarily.

After a decent interval he, Paolo, would make love openly to Eve, and they would be married.

To bring these results to pass, Magnani had worked with care and ingenuity. (Even when all had failed at last, he still seemed proud of that!) He was popular in the neighbourhood of Hidden Hall Court, and had 'got hold of' a constable at Ardry-le-Mare without difficulty. Fanny Gillett had promised her help for love of Kennedy Haste. (It was she who took Pandora back to the Court from the police station at Ardry-le-Mare, where the girl had been drugged.) And at first the plan had worked on oiled wheels.

Magnani had suggested the honeymoon invitation to Don, urging that it would 'heap coals of fire' on Eve's head.

As for the bride's disappearance, that had been brought about with the utmost simplicity. He had been on the spot, playing the part of Marianti, and had discussed with Fanny several ways of stage-managing the 'vanishing' act. But having overheard Eve's suggestion to sing to her husband while the latter remained in the dining-room, it had seemed as if Fate were playing into his hands.

While the pair talked at the table of their first meeting at the 'Ritz,' hurriedly he took off wig and make-up. And in his own character he had silently shown himself to Eve at the secret door in the panelling, his finger on his lip. Then, with a smile and an air of playful mystery, he had beckoned. Entering into the supposed joke, excited and curious, she had obeyed the summons. Even half-way down the concealed stairway she had willingly followed. There, he had seized the girl, and pressing over her face a prepared mask filled with Rawdon's new anæsthetic, he had stifled her into unconsciousness. The rest—getting Eve down to the 'hidden hall'—was not difficult. The one dangerous moment came when passing the laboratory. Rawdon was there, as Magnani knew better than anyone else. But the door was shut, and no contretemps happened. In the room with the unconscious girl he had replaced his white wig, and a part of his damaged make-up. He had made a wound in his arm, according to plan, stained a boot of Rawdon's which he had secreted, and rushed upstairs to the tapestry boudoir in which, as it was seldom opened, he would be safe for a moment. As Dagon surmised, he had taken impression of Rawdon's finger prints, having a plaster cast of his hand. All these materials, and the skeleton, Magnani had got ready for use in a different plan, but this chance had been too good to miss. Three

minutes in the tapestry boudoir were enough. Paolo returned to the cellar, stuffed the skeleton (which he had waiting there in an unused box) and the pair of boots into the furnace fire, where already Rawdon had placed the leather bag. Then Magnani got to his own room, long before the alarm was given.

There, he carefully renewed 'Marianti's' damaged appearance, and was ready innocently to 'discover' the open panel in the music-room.

Pandora's taking upon herself Rawdon's supposed guilt was the first hitch in Magnani's programme. He had done his best to thwart her by bribing the constable and commandeering Fanny's help. Mrs. Gillett had shown herself 'tiresome,' but she was in his power. Then, it had been a serious blow when the skeleton had been proved to be that of a man. Magnani had, however, piled up more evidence against Rawdon, whom he still hoped to eliminate. 'And so I should have done,' he finished at last, 'if it hadn't been for that devil, Dagon, and the girl Pandora. I have to thank those two for my ruin.'

'And we have to thank them for our salvation,' said Haste.

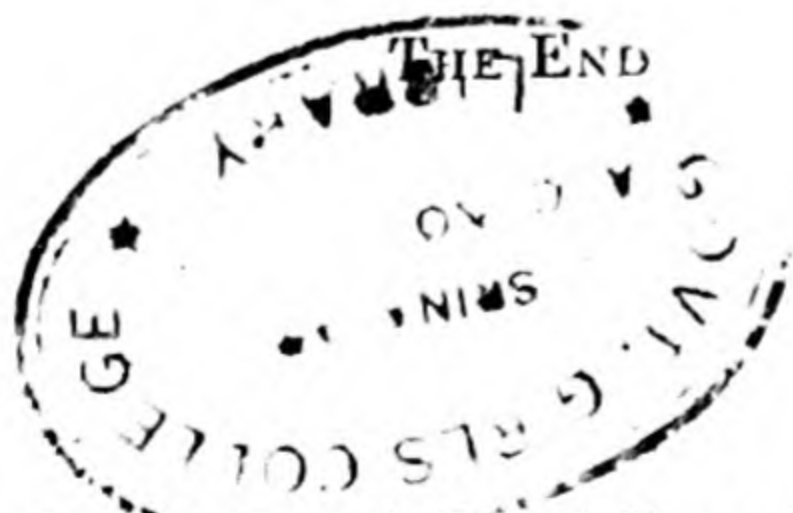
'Yes!' sneered Magnani. 'Yes, I suppose you sentimentals will now contrive to "live happily for ever after"—all five of you. Though I don't see how my dear Rawdon and the rightful heir

can juggle the estates and title, without the whole business coming out.'

'Meaning me by the "rightful heir"?' Dagon flung back. 'Gosh, what would I do with a title? And I wouldn't have this wicked old ghost-ridden house for a gift. When I settle down I'll have a villa in Italy. But I'm hanged if I'll ever go to a movie show anywhere, for fear I see the grinning mug of Signor Paolo Magnani! My sister will be Lady Wells. That's enough for me! And any rights I might have in Hidden Hall Court I make over to her. Now I'm going to put you neck and crop out of this house, Magnani, in the company of Miss Gillett. Then we can begin the "happy for ever after" business! And the honeymoon can go on as if it had never been interrupted.'

'Dagon, you're wonderful,' said Rawdon Wells.

'Brother, I love you,' said Pandora Haste.



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